

Policy Name	Lettings Policy
Version No.	5
Approval Date	11/12/2018
Category	Operational
Classification	Internal

Lettings Policy	
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Version Control

Version	Date	Description	Updated By	Approved By
4	Oct 2018	Updated to new policy format	Richard Keeley	Exec Director - Operations
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1. Policy Purpose & Aim

The ExtraCare Charitable Trust (ECCT) is committed to delivering our vision – ‘Better Lives for Older People’. Part of this commitment means ensuring that we create communities that are balanced, and that we let homes to people with a range of needs including care and other needs. We also aim to ensure that rental homes are let efficiently, to ensure that they do not remain empty longer than necessary.

As a specialist provider of housing and care for older people, the ECCT is committed to ensuring we house people over the age of 55, and that our rental homes are used to maximise the opportunities for people over 55 live in an ExtraCare location who are unable to purchase.

The aim of this policy is to define clearly what how we define a ‘void’ (empty property); our approach to letting our rental homes within locations; how we assess who we let homes to, and outline the appeals process for applicants.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure consistency of approach across all ECCT premises;
- Ensure every member of staff and all residents understand ECCT’s approach to letting empty properties;
- Ensure that the time that rental properties are kept empty (‘void’) awaiting re-let is kept to a minimum;
- Meet legislative and regulatory requirements; and
- Comply with the ARCO Consumer Code

3. Scope of Policy

This policy applies across all ECCT owned locations, and impacts on tenants and prospective tenants. The policy also applies to locations where ECCT are the managing agent carrying out the landlord function. The policy does not apply to ECCT locations where the tenancies are managed by a partner landlord, although it is our expectation that the principles of the policy are adopted by the partner landlord.

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4. Responsibilities

4.1 Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees of ECCT has overall governance responsibility for implementation of this policy and will ensure that adequate physical and financial resources are made available to enable ECCT to meet its obligations under this policy and associated procedures.

4.2 Operations Committee

The Operations Committee seeks assurance that ECCT activities at locations comply with all legislative and regulatory requirements and that risk in these areas is effectively managed. The Operations Committee shall;

- Keep under review regulatory activity and make recommendations as to any further areas for management action
- Keep under review lettings arrangements and other applicable statutory requirements, and monitor policy and legislative compliance, and;
- Keep abreast of all new legislation that impacts on tenancy management and consider proposals for effective implementation.

4.3 Operations Directorate

The Executive Director of Operations (EDO) has strategic responsibility for tenancy management and will oversee the implementation of the Lettings Policy and associated procedures. They will advise the Chief Executive of any failure in the management arrangements.

The Head of Compliance and Improvement (HOCl) is responsible for ensuring that the lettings arrangements at ECCT locations detailed in this policy are compliant with regulatory, legislative and best practice requirements. They will inform the EDO and the Operations Committee of any issues of non-compliance.

The Housing & Customer Engagement Manager (HCEM) has responsibility for ensuring compliance with this policy. They will be responsible for reviewing cases where rental properties are empty (void) for over 4 weeks and ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place to ensure the property is let. This will include, where nomination arrangements permit it, ensuring that properties are let through alternative sources of referrals or through internal waiting lists. The HCEM also has responsibility for ensuring information shared with prospective tenants is easy to understand, comprehensive and enables them to make an informed choice on whether to accept an offer of housing. The HCEM also has responsibility for assessing and responding to appeals from applicants who have been refused a rental property and / or believe that they have been treated unfairly through the lettings process.

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The Regional Operations Managers (ROMs) and Cluster Manager (CM) are responsible for assessing village profile information and ensuring that balanced community objectives are met.

Location Managers have the responsibility to initiate the void process by confirming the date the property is void (or notice given), setting the criteria required for re-letting the property such as care / non- care need and village profile considerations and to advise the Housing Officer accordingly. The location manager has responsibility for approving or selecting the applicant. If the applicant meets the criteria, and there are no issues raised through the assessments, then an offer will be made. If the applicant does not meet the criteria, or there are concerns as a result of the assessment process, then the location manager may refuse the applicant but must specify to both the local authority and the applicant the reasons for refusal.

The Housing Officer has responsibility to arrange void works to be carried out, request a nomination from the local authority, and ensure that the appropriate assessments are carried out. The Housing Officer has responsibility for reporting any issues in the process for the location manager to resolve. The Housing Officer has responsibility for arranging the sign-up of the selected applicant, and responsibility for ensuring that all applicants receive appropriate information in relation to the location so that applicants are able to make an informed decision on whether to accept an offer of housing.

Staff in locations such as Housing Assistants and Administrators may facilitate viewings for potential applicants.

5. Monitoring & Review

The success of the policy is in delivering the aim of ensuring tenancies are let within 4 weeks, or – if no care or appropriate nomination is forthcoming – within 8 weeks.

This policy will be subject to a full review at least every 3 years.

6. Risk Management

All ECCT tenancy agreements are approved by the Housing & Customer Engagement Manager prior to issue. This ensures that the correct tenancy is issued and that the details contained within the tenancy is correct. This will reduce the risk of incorrect tenancy agreements being issued.

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Voids over 4 weeks will be monitored by the Housing & Customer Engagement Manager to ensure that appropriate actions are being taken to reduce financial loss due to loss of gross rent to ECCT as a result of properties remaining empty for an excessive period.

7. Statement of Commitment

This policy helps ECCT to meet the regulatory requirement contained within the Tenancy Standard:

“Registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants.... There should be clear application, decision-making and appeals processes.”

8. The ExtraCare Approach to Lettings

As a general statement, our rental homes are let to people over 55. There are a range of referral routes that are specific to each location, but generally this is through a nominations agreement with the local authority. Applicants with a care need appropriate to independent living will take priority over those without a care need. Applicants with the best fit with our village profile (aimed at achieving a balanced community) will take president over those who do not contribute to this balance. Through the process we shall provide applicants with relevant information to ensure that they are able to make an informed choice as to whether the property is appropriate for them.

To assess an applicant’s suitability ECCT will undertake an assessment of their suitability before offering a property. This will include an assessment of their wellbeing, care needs and ability to afford the property.

ECCT will seek to minimise the time that rental properties remain empty with a target of re-letting a void property with an appropriate nomination – usually someone with a care need - within four weeks. If the local authority is unable to provide a nomination with a care need after four weeks, we will request a non-care nomination. If, after further four weeks, we have had no appropriate nominations we will seek to find an applicant outside of the nomination arrangements.

For new villages, we expect the local authorities to provide the appropriate nominations so that the rental properties are fully let within six months of opening. We will seek to find applicants outside of the nominations arrangements if rental properties remain void six-months after the date of practical completion of a new village.

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Where there are no nominations agreements in place, we will use our own waiting lists or other means to let the property within four weeks.

Defining a Rental Void:

A void is a when the required Notice period by the tenant has come to an end, and the keys have been returned. The void period begins from the following Monday. In the case of new properties, a property is void from the Monday after the date of practical completion.

For weekly tenancies, the required notice period is 4 weeks, ending at midnight on Sunday. For monthly tenancies, the required Notice period is a full calendar month, ending on the Sunday after the full calendar month period.

Once either the required notice has been given, or the property has been declared void, and the tenancy ended on the Customer Portal, we are able to take steps to re-let the property, in line with ExtraCare’s Terminating A Tenancy Policy.

Approach to Letting Void Properties:

Where the location has a nominations agreement in place with the local authority, ECCT will seek at least one nomination for the property according to the specific arrangements of that agreement. ECCT will request a nomination on the basis of the following criteria:

1. That all in their household must be over 55
2. Applicants with care needs appropriate to independent living will take priority over those without a care need
3. Applicants with the best fit with our village profile, aimed at achieving a balanced community, will take precedence over those who do not contribute to this balance

ECCT will supply to the local authority any relevant information to support the above criteria. If the local authority are unable to supply a nomination for an applicant requiring care within 4 weeks, then ECCT will request that the local authority provide at least one applicant not requiring care within a further 4 weeks.

If – after 8 weeks from the date of the initial request – the local authority do not provide a suitable nomination, ECCT reserve the option to find a suitable applicant outside the nomination arrangements.

For all new locations, ECCT expects the local authority to provide the appropriate nominations so that the rental properties are fully let within six months of opening. If – after six months – any properties remain empty, then ECCT will seek to find suitable applicants outside the nomination process.

Where a location does not have a nominations agreement, or the nominations agreement allows ECCT to let a proportion of properties outside of the nominations process, then ECCT will seek to let the property according to the above criteria.

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Where we receive more than one nomination from the local authority, and more than one applicant meets the criteria, if all factors are equal then we will select the applicant who has been on the local authority waiting list the longest.

During the nomination / referral process, prospective applicants will be provided with ECCT's Key Facts document and any other relevant information, so that they are able to make an informed choice about whether the property is appropriate for them.

Approach to Assessing Applicants:

To assess an applicant's suitability ECCT will undertake an assessment of their suitability before offering a property. This will include an assessment of their wellbeing, care needs and ability to afford the property.

If an aid or adaptation is required in order to enable an applicant to accept an offer, then this will be considered in accordance with ECCT's Aids and Adaptations Policy.

Irrespective of the referral route (whether it be through the local authority or through ECCT) ECCT will approve the offer of a tenancy, once the assessments have taken place. ECCT reserve the right not to make an offer of a rental property.

If an offer of a tenancy (or other form of occupation) is made, this will be in line with ECCT's Tenancy Management Policy.

The reasons for refusing an applicant would be due to:

- Having care needs beyond where the applicant can live independently in an extra care environment
- Unable to afford the property and / or care charges, according to ExtraCare's Affordability Statement
- Where there are significant rent arrears at their existing property and / or if they are the subject of current enforcement action due to breach of current tenancy / lease / licence
- Ability to realistically able afford to purchase an ExtraCare property (either through shared ownership or outright sale)

In all cases, the specific reasons for refusal will be made known to the applicant.

Appeals Process:

This policy aims to ensure that all applicants to ECCT are treated in an open and transparent way. ECCT seeks to ensure that applicants do not suffer unfavourable or discriminatory treatment through the application process. If an applicant feels that they have not been fairly treated through the application process, they have a right to appeal against a decision not to

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offer a property; or if an offer has been made but the applicant nonetheless feels that they have been treated unfairly.

In such circumstances, the applicant will be able to appeal to the Regional Operations Manager, with timescales for response in line with the Complaints Management Policy.

9. Information and Training

The staff indicated as being the responsible staff (in section 4. Responsibilities – above) will be trained by the Housing & Customer Engagement Manager. All other staff will be made aware of the Policy.

10. Other Relevant ECCT Policies & Documents

General
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancy Management Policy • Aids and Adaptations Policy • Complaints Management Policy • Terminating a Tenancy Policy
Forms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ExtraCare Assured Tenancy Agreement • ExtraCare Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement
Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability Statement

11. Relevant Legislative & Regulatory Requirements

Legislation
Housing Act, 1996
Localism Act, 2012
Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017
Regulation
Regulator of Social Housing – Tenancy Standard