

*Creating affordable
homes and empowering
communities*

Lettings and Transfer Policy



CONTROLLING AUTHORITY: Head of Income		
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making a splash
in the areas we serve

INDEX

1. Introduction
2. Policy Statement
3. Housing Register Priority
4. Eligibility Criteria
5. Working People
6. Compliance
7. Tenant Release Scheme
8. Decorating Allowance
9. Management Transfer
10. Hard to Let Property
11. Monitoring
12. Policy Links

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Boston Mayflower aims to make best use of its housing stock and address housing need by actively assisting its existing tenants to transfer within its properties.
- 1.2 Applications will be recorded on the Boston Common Housing Register and will be prioritised using the banding scheme defined in the Choice Based Lettings Scheme Policy, which should be read in conjunction with this policy.
- 1.3 We aim to give consideration to the needs of the individual and the community when making offers of accommodation. We aim to process empty properties quickly to maximise income and make properties available for re-letting by judicious use of repairs and decoration allowances in accordance with the Lettings standards.
- 1.4 It is the Company's Policy to treat all applicants equally regardless of ethnic or national origin, colour, race, age, sex, religion, gender, marital status, sexuality, health, disability or other reason. Information provided by applicants will be used to enable the company, through the Choice Based Lettings partnership, to ensure that accommodation is allocated fairly.
- 1.5 When making an offer of a property all tenants and household members aged 18 and over will be checked to ensure they can legally rent a residential property in England known as the "Right to Rent" .
- 1.6 All new and transferring tenants will be required to complete a Pre-Tenancy Financial Assessment to establish affordability of property, before an official offer of a property is made.
- 1.7 We will notify all new tenants of any known pending changes that will affect their tenancy. (eg Welfare changes such as the LHA cap)

2.0 Policy Statement

- 2.1 Boston Mayflower is a charity and needs to ensure that it's housing stock and services are used effectively and in accordance with its charitable objects. In particular, Boston Mayflower Limited will endeavour to ensure that accommodation will be allocated effectively to charitable beneficiaries of Boston Mayflower Limited i.e. to people who are not able to afford suitable housing on the open market or who have particular needs arising from their age, disability or ill health. Between suitable people we prioritise those in greatest housing need [except where this would lead to unsustainable tenancies or communities], whilst facilitating where possible the ability to move for existing tenants.
- 2.2 This policy covers all tenants let under the terms of the Company's Assured Tenancy Agreement.
- 2.3 Boston Mayflower will at all times remain aware of the impact its policy can have on:
 - Reducing under and over occupation of dwellings
 - Sustaining communities
 - Meeting the needs and wishes of tenants
 - Enhancing the quality of home life

2.4 The Policy will explain:

- Priority within the Choice Based Lettings scheme
- Eligibility Criteria
- Compliance
- Eligible to receive help under the Release scheme
- Decorating Allowance Scheme
- Management Transfers
- Hard to let Properties

3.0 **Housing Register Priority**

3.1 Once accepted applications will be prioritised according to the criteria set out in the Choice Based Lettings Policy with an assessment of need being made from the information received on the application form, medical form and any subsequent submission e.g. medical letter, reports from other agencies and from Boston Mayflower Area Teams.

3.2 Applicants will be placed in the appropriate band (Gold, Silver, Bronze, Copper) according to their current situation:

- overcrowding
- under occupation
- medical need
- older tenants needing sheltered housing
- exceptional circumstances - major structural repairs are required or the property occupied by the applicant is urgently needed for someone with an urgent need for that type of property
- welfare and social needs

4.0 **Eligibility Criteria**

- **Sheltered Accommodation**
Applicants with an assessed support need for this type of accommodation
- **2 Bed Bungalows**
Applicants over pension credit age or over 50 with a medical need for ground floor accommodation. Priority will be given to those who would not under occupy.
- **1 Bed Bungalows**
Applicants over pension credit age or over 50 with a medical need for ground floor accommodation
- **3 Bed Houses / Flats**
Families with 2, 3 or 4 children. Priority will be given to those who would not under occupy.
- **2 Bed Houses / Flats**
Families with 1 or 2 children.
- **1 Bed Houses / Flats**
Couple or single person under pension credit age.
- **Bedsits**
Single people under pension credit age.

- 4.1 When a sensitive letting is required due to community issues approval is required from the Head of Customer Services prior to advertising.
- 4.2 An additional criteria for Boston Mayflower tenants who are currently under occupying will be added for 1 and 2 bed Houses / flats and for tenants who are under occupying who are over 50 for 1 bed bungalows. This will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 4.3 An additional 5% to 10% of general needs accommodation will be prioritised for working people.

5.0 Working People

- 5.1 The legal advice is that our policy application is that we 'strive to, wherever possible, give preference to.....working people to be defined as those in paid employment or voluntary work for at least 16 hours a week for a continuous period of six months or fulfilling the role of an approved foster carer.
- 5.2 To qualify for priority either the tenant or their partner must be in work as defined above.
- 5.3 They must provide proof by requesting a letter from their employer or voluntary sector organisation or provide 6 months certified accounts if self employed.

6.0 Compliance

- 6.1 To be eligible for an offer of accommodation tenants will be expected to:
- have a satisfactory rent account clear of arrears and have no outstanding former tenant arrears or rechargeable repairs
 - have maintained their present home in good condition
 - not be subject to legal action by the Company for any breach of their tenancy conditions
- 6.2 We will take account of an individual's circumstances when checking compliance, and work with tenants wishing to transfer to help them reduce housing related debts, and provide money advice and assist with benefit claims.
- 6.3 We may consider overlooking the compliance conditions before allowing a move, for those who would suffer extreme financial hardship (subject to completion of a Financial Assessment showing inability to pay) or have overriding vulnerability issues or medical needs.

7.0 Tenant Release Scheme

- 7.1 In order to assist in its efforts to make best use of its homes and to help and encourage older tenants occupying general needs accommodation to move the Company operates the Tenant Release scheme. This will be extended to vulnerable and disabled people who are currently under occupying to assist them with moving to smaller accommodation.

7.2 This assistance is in the form of practical help arranging removals, carrying out minor alterations, decorating, changing utilities, and rent free weeks to provide time to move, if necessary. Approval is delegated to the Lettings Support Manager.

7.3 The following criteria also apply:

- The Company reserves the right to withhold payment of the allowance or part of it where there are re-chargeable works which are clearly the tenant's responsibility in respect of the property being vacated
- The Board of Management reserves the right to suspend the scheme subject to the availability of sufficient funding.
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8.0 Decorating Allowance Scheme

8.1 The Company operates a decorating allowance scheme, as described in its Void Management Policy, which also provides financial assistance to transferring tenants in appropriate circumstances.

8.2 It should be noted here that the Company reserves the right to withhold all or part of an allowance to any transferring tenant if it finds the property being vacated as a result of the transfer itself requires the award of a decorating allowance.

9.0 Management Transfers

9.1 The primary aim of Boston Mayflower is to maintain balanced and stable communities, which are safe, thriving and attractive places to live

9.2 In order to maintain communities there may be exceptional circumstances where a tenant may need to be moved as a matter of urgency e.g. asbestos, major structural repairs, assignment to an alternative property, due to domestic violence or harassment.

9.3 These exceptional circumstances will be known as Management Transfers and will require a report from the appropriate Customer Services Manager (Engagement and ASB), approved by the Head of Customer Services, and forwarded to the Housings Options Manager, who will keep a record and send onto Boston Borough Council.

9.4 Boston Borough Council will then place the applicant into Gold Band as a matter of urgency.

10.0 Hard to Let Properties

10.1 A low demand or 'hard to let' property is a property which remains unlet after two bidding cycles.

10.2 Following a property being designated as 'hard to let' we may: :

- Offer incentives e.g. rent free period or generous decoration allowance
- Offer a direct let on a first come first served basis, dependent on eligibility

- Promote the properties outside of the Boston Choice Based Letting Scheme to attract prospective tenants who may/are not be registered on the Housing Register

(This list is not exhaustive but demonstrates a few examples of possible actions)

10.3 If we are unable to attract interest in hard to let or low demand properties, as stated in point 10.2, we will carry out an appraisal of the properties including:

- Rent Loss through voids
- Tenancy turnover
- Daily and future maintenance expenditure
- Anti-social Behaviour occurrences
- Area/geographic issues

Following this assessment we will give consideration to:

- Carrying out improvements
- Re-designating the properties e.g. reducing number of bedrooms or conversion to shared accommodation
- Disposal of the properties

11.0 Monitoring

11.1 As with all Boston Mayflower activity it is expected that this service will be provided in a way, which conforms to all Policies and Standing Orders of the Company particularly with regard to Equal Opportunities.

11.2 The Housings Options Manager will record:

- the number of transfers completed
- the number of complaints/appeals made against the system
- the number and reasons for management transfers.

12.0 Review

12.1 This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure compliance with best practice and legislation.

13.0 Policy Links

13.1 The following Boston Mayflower policies are also relevant when dealing with transfer tenants:

- Void Management Policy
- Choice Based Lettings Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Domestic Violence Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Sheltered Housing Policy
- Income Management Policy



Equality Impact Assessment Initial Screening

Name of policy / strategy / project (the” initiative”):

Lettings & Transfer Policy

Provide a brief summary of the aims and main activities of the initiative: (bullet points)

To let our properties to new tenants in conjunction with the Boston Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
To make best use of our housing stock and address housing need by actively assisting tenants to transfer within our properties.

Completed by: Wendy Walker

Date: April 2016

STAGE 1: SCREENING

This stage establishes whether a proposed initiative will have an impact from an equality perspective on any particular group of people or community – i.e. on the grounds of race, religion/faith/belief, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, age, disability, or whether it is “equality neutral” (i.e. have no effect either positive or negative).

Q 1. Who will benefit from this initiative? Is there likely to be a positive impact on specific groups/communities (whether or not they are the intended beneficiaries), and if so, how? Or is it clear at this stage that it will be equality ‘neutral’ i.e. will have no particular effect on any group? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

All tenants and future tenants of Boston Mayflower

Q 2. Is there likely to be an adverse impact on one or more minority/under-represented or community group as a result of this initiative? If so, who may be affected and why: Or is it clear at this stage that it will be equality 'neutral'? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

No single group will be adversely affected by this policy and its implementation.

Q 3. Is there sufficient data on the target beneficiary groups/communities? Are any of these groups under or over represented? Do they have access to the same resources? What are your sources of data and are there any gaps? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

Information on tenants and applicants families from tenancy profiling and the data held on database.

Q 4. Outsourced services – if the initiative is partly or wholly provided by external organisations / agencies, please list any arrangements you plan to ensure that they promote equality and diversity. *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

This is an internal policy and we are responsible for its implementation.

Q 5. Is the impact of the initiative (whether positive or negative) significant enough to warrant a full impact assessment – see guidance? If not, will there be monitoring and review to assess the level of impact over a period of time? *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

We do not perceive any negative impact that would warrant a full EIA. Should any negative impact be highlighted through implementation, the policy and EIA will be reviewed.

Q 6. To be completed at six monthly review Detail actions taken to assess the level of impact over a period of time, or to address any gaps in data. *Please consider all aspects of Diversity including as a minimum: Age, Disability, Gender/Transgender, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Faith/Belief, Sexuality*

At Policy reviews.

Guidelines: Things to consider

- Where a negative (i.e. adverse) impact is identified, it may be appropriate to make a full EIA (see Stage 2), or, as important, take early action to redress this – e.g. by abandoning or modifying the initiative. NB If the initiative contravenes equality legislation; it must be abandoned or modified.
- Where an initiative has a positive impact on groups/community relations, the EIA should make this explicit, to enable the outcomes to be monitored over its lifespan.
- Where there is a positive impact on particular groups, does this mean there could be an adverse impact on others, and if so can this be justified? - E.g. are there other existing or planned initiatives which redress this?
- It may not be possible to provide detailed answers to some of these questions at the start of the initiative. The EIA may identify a lack of relevant data, and that data-gathering is a specific action required to inform the initiative as it develops, and also to form part of a continuing evaluation and review process.
- It is envisaged that it will be rare for full impact assessments to be required. Usually, where there are particular problems identified in the screening stage, it is envisaged that changing the approach at this stage, and/or setting up a monitoring/evaluation system to review a policy's impact over time will tackle the problem.