

Downsizing Policy



Section;	Housing
Policy name;	Downsizing Policy
Executive responsible;	Head of Housing
Review by;	Head of Housing
Tenant review;	Yes
Type of review;	Exception
Authority to amend;	Chief Executive
Frequency of review;	Every three years
Last review;	June 2019
Next review;	June 2022
Responsibility for delivery;	Housing Team
Strategy;	Housing Management Strategy
Supporting Documents;	Lettings Policy
Associated risk;	Tenant Co-Regulation, Failure to comply with legislation, Maintaining regulatory status.
Health & Safety;	No specific implications
Equality & diversity;	No specific implications
VFM & benchmarking;	Making best use of existing stock by generating vacancies through downsize moves is better value for money in meeting housing demand than new development.

VERSION CONTROL			
Version Number	Sections Amended	Date of update	Approved by
1.0	First issue	June 2019	Chief Executive

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1. AIMS

Our aim is to make best use of our housing stock by reducing under-occupation and freeing up homes for applicants in housing need. This policy sets out how we will encourage and support tenants to downsize to a home that is more suited to their needs.

2. CONTEXT

The Tenancy Standard 2012 states that we should “take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants” and we should demonstrate how our lettings “make the best use of available housing” are “compatible with the purpose of the housing” and “contribute to local authorities’ strategic housing function and sustainable communities”.

We identified through our last tenant census in 2016 that around 160 tenants were under-occupying their home. The demand for family sized homes remains high in all local authorities we have homes in but highest demand is for one bedroom homes.

In our Housing Management Strategy we recognised that some tenants have lived in their homes and their communities for many years and have strong connections to both. We do not want tenants to feel forced out of their homes, instead we wanted to identify the best ways to encourage and support tenants to overcome the barriers associated with downsizing. To do that we worked with our Tenants Performance Panel and tenants who are under-occupying their homes, this policy reflects the findings of that work.

3. ELIGIBILITY

Tenants are eligible under this policy if they are living in a Cornerstone property with three or more bedrooms (with no minimum age restrictions) and they are willing to move to a home that is smaller than their current home and suitable for their needs

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(as defined by our lettings policy). Due to the demand for one bedroom homes, which is the highest across all the local authorities within which we work, and the high number of two bed flats in our stock, we may allow a tenant to downsize and continue under-occupying their new home.

4. INFORMATION & ADVICE

We will provide information to tenants about this policy and the support available through general and targeted communication including in our tenant newsletter, leaflets, on our website and other forms of digital media.

Where a tenant is considering a downsize move we will visit them to discuss their housing options, what they would like from their move, any concerns they have and support they may need.

We may also refer tenants for other specialist support from other agencies, in agreement with them.

5. FINDING A SMALLER HOME

We will help tenants to explore the housing options available to them including Devon Home Choice and HomeSwapper (for Mutual Exchanges). Tenants will be provided with information about these schemes and support to register and engage with them.

Exploring these schemes will maximise the options for tenants who are downsizing but we recognise through our work with tenants that some will not be able to or want to engage with them. In addition, some will only want to downsize to homes in a particular area or to a particular property type that meets their needs. Our research also tells us that some may only move if they can remain a tenant of ours. Under these circumstances, our Lettings Policy allows us to direct match downsizing tenants to other properties we own.

In practice, we will keep a register of tenants who wish to downsize along with their agreed property needs. We will contact a tenant if a suitable property comes up that we feel meets their needs and will follow the normal lettings verification process. Where we have more than one tenant interested in a property we may advertise the property on Devon Home Choice giving preference to all tenants that are downsizing and we will encourage tenants to bid.

6. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

We know that the financial burden of moving home can be a barrier to tenants downsizing, so to help them with the costs associated with moving to a smaller home we will offer financial assistance up to the value of £1200. This will be a flexible payment system that can be used towards the items set out in Appendix 1.

The amount of financial assistance offered will be kept under review and may be lower or higher depending on available budget. The settlement of outstanding debts to us will be the priority for payment before any other financial assistance is given.

7. PRACTICAL SUPPORT

We understand that the practicalities of downsizing can be a worry and a barrier to tenants downsizing. When talking to tenants about the downsizing process we will get an understanding of what practical support they need and have available for things such as seeking a home, packing, organising removals etc. and where possible we will provide or refer them for additional support.

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every three years but will be updated sooner where needed. We will record the amount of downsize moves facilitated by the implementation of this policy and will measure tenant satisfaction with the process.

APPENDIX 1 – FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR DOWNSIZERS

The flexible payment of up to £1200 in total can be used towards the items listed below and tenants will be able to claim their payment once evidence of payment has been received (for example receipts).

We accept that in some cases tenants may not be financially able to pay out and claim back for some items so we are happy to liaise directly with our approved contractors for carpets and removals.

Items tenants can claim for:

- Removal costs (including packing, services of removal company or van hire)
- Carpets or other flooring for the new home
- Curtains or blinds
- Furniture (such as sofa's, beds, white goods to fit in new smaller home)
- Payment of rent arrears or other debts with us
- Payment of rent in advance on a new home
- Re-direction of post
- Disconnection and reconnection of appliances such as cookers and washing machines
- One-off re-connection of services such as telephone, broadband, television

Other moving related costs may be considered at the discretion of the Head of Housing.