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City Of Lincoln Council Right Home (transfer incentive) Policy



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Document Control

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20 October 2023	David Genery	0	New policy
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Document Approvals

This document requires the following approvals:

Sponsor Approval	Name	Date
Executive	Cllr Donald Nannestad	
CMT	Daren Turner	

Introduction

City of Lincoln Council (“the council”) has a duty make the best use of its housing stock.

In Lincoln there are council properties which are under-occupied by tenants. This means that there are more bedrooms in the property than the people living there need, usually because, over time, the family size has changed reducing the number of people living in the home.

In addition, there are homes no longer meet the needs of the tenant(s) and a move would be beneficial to them and release properties to be allocated to those who need them, such as properties that have been adapted for people with disabilities.

This policy is intended to make sure that tenants can access the right size and type of property for them and make sure that properties are being used to their full capacity and release some homes to be let through the Allocations Policy.

The council aims to provide incentives and support to tenants who are under occupying to move to more suitable properties.

How will the policy deliver:

- We will work closely with all relevant local authority departments to help support a move where possible.
- We will offer both financial and practical support which can take a variety of forms i.e., help with connecting utilities or a handyperson service to tenants to make it easier for them to move.
- We may make direct offers of accommodation to assist tenants needing to move to the right home.
- Tenants and council staff have clear and accessible information on:
 - Right Home transfer incentives, support, and assistance.
 - The payments and support available to tenants.
 - What deductions will be taken from payments.
 - Reviews and appeals.

This scheme is discretionary, not a core function of the council. The scheme can be withdrawn at any time if funding is no longer available.

Eligibility for the scheme

These are the circumstances that we will consider someone joining the scheme:

- Currently a secure tenant.
- Have one or more bedrooms not occupied.
- The property has been adapted for a person with disabilities, and they are no longer needed
- Eligible to join the housing register
- Vacant possession on tenancy concluding i.e. no other household members will remain in the property or be made homeless as a result.

- A property inspection is completed at the time of application and there are no serious property issues (that are not the council's responsibility to repair).
- Access to be granted to the council to complete a property inspection again before the move to ensure that the property condition has not changed and meets our void standards.

There may be circumstances when a tenant would not qualify to join the scheme, or are removed from the scheme as follows:

- If a tenant lives in an adapted property and a member of the household still needs the specialist facilities.
- The tenant was allocated and accepted a hard to let property which was larger than they needed, such as a 2-bed high rise flat.
- If there is no funding available.
- If there are serious breaches of tenancy, such as but not limited to; criminality, ASB or outstanding possession action.
- If there are serious issues with the condition of the property.
- If access is not given to check the property, or the tenant disengages from the process (such as not providing information for the housing register or replying to offers of properties in time).
- 2 suitable offers have been made and been unreasonably refused (more information about refusals can be found in section 8 of Lincs Homefinder Allocations Policy).

Applications to be considered for the scheme can be submitted using the online form on our website, or by being referred by an Officer of the council.

Incentives

These circumstances below are examples of when we will consider making incentive payments:

- where tenants are affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy (often called the bedroom tax), creating a shortfall in benefit payments which has led to rent arrears.
- where tenants are occupying family homes which are no longer needed to accommodate the household.
- where tenants are living in homes with adaptations for a disabled person, and these are no longer needed, for example, homes with a through-floor lift or disabled adapted kitchens.
- where tenants are under-occupying a property because they have discretionary succession rights to a tenancy.
- where tenants wish to move to a smaller property, and their household composition allows them to do so.
- Where tenants wish to move from a general needs property to an Independent Living property but need assistance to move

Incentive payments will not be considered where:

- the tenant(s) are occupying a property on insecure terms e.g., an introductory tenancy, a licence agreement, temporary accommodation, non-secure tenancy agreement or where payments have been accepted for use and occupation only, the tenant has been

served with a Notice or is subject to possession for serious breaches of tenancy such as criminality or ASB.

There is a standard incentive payment for moving through the scheme of £1500, plus £1000 per under-occupied room released, or Independent Living bonus, or releasing an adapted property bonus. The incentive payments that can be applied are shown in the table below.

Size of property tenant is leaving	Size of property tenant is eligible for	Size of property tenant wants to move to and qualifies for	Incentive(s)*
1-bed general needs	1-bed	1-bed Independent Living	£1000 (Independent Living bonus)
2-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	1-bed	1-bed flat or bungalow	£1000
3-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	1-bed	1-bed flat or bungalow	£2000
3-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	1-bed	2-bed flat	£1000 + spare room
3-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	2-bed	2-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	£1000
4-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	1-bed	1-bed flat or bungalow	£3000
4-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	1-bed	2-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	£2000 + spare room
4-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	2-bed	2-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	£2000
4-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	2-bed	3-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	£1000 + spare room
4-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	3-bed	3-bed flat, house, maisonette, bungalow	£1000
Any 2-bed or larger	1-bed	1-bed Independent Living	£1000 per room + £1000 (Independent Living bonus)
Any size with significant adaptations** for disabilities	To match household need (in line with Allocations Policy)	To match household need (in line with Allocations Policy)	£1000

*Plus disruption payment (see below)

**Significant adaptations are lowered kitchen, through floor lifts, fully adapted bathrooms (e.g. specialist baths or wet rooms). Properties with stairlifts may be considered significantly adapted if there are other adaptations as well.

The maximum incentive payment is capped at £5000 per move (not including disruption payment).

Disruption payments

In addition to the incentive payments, we will pay a disruption payment of £1000 for those who qualify for the scheme. This payment will cover costs such as removal costs, reconnecting and disconnecting utilities, refitting flooring.

Support with moving

We acknowledge that moving can be a stressful and often challenging time for tenants.

If assistance is needed for a tenant to move to another property, we will help with:

- arranging removals
- arranging disconnection and reconnection of services
- refitting carpets
- decorating

The cost of carrying out any or all the above would be taken from the disruption payment and the balance paid to the tenants.

Handyperson

In addition to offering incentive payments, the council may offer a handyperson service to help with jobs such as tiling, putting up shelves and hanging blinds at the new property. The costs for this will need to be deducted from the lump sum payment or paid on invoice.

Advice and Assistance

The council will provide advice and assistance on housing options, to tenants who are under-occupying, especially to those who are potentially affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy or otherwise struggling financially to cover the costs of running a larger home. Tenants identified as under-occupying their homes may be contacted periodically to inform them of housing options and incentives as these become available. This could include:

- advice on mutual exchange.
- advice about the availability of smaller properties.
- money advice and debt management.

Best use of stock

Applications to this scheme will be prioritised in line with the provisions of the Allocations Policy. This may include moving from a house to a flat, or if suitable, into Independent Living or supported accommodation. Where several households on the scheme are waiting

for a similar property, priority will generally be given to those releasing the most in demand property.

In circumstances where a tenant is under-occupying an adapted property, which has been funded through a disabled facility grant, the council will look to find a smaller property which has already been adapted, fully or partially, to meet the household's needs. If this is not possible then we would look to adapt the property moved to in conjunction with a report from an occupational therapist to meet the household's needs prior to occupation.

Mutual Exchanges

Applications to this scheme can be considered for mutual exchanges where the exchanging household is under-occupying or in an adapted property with no need of the adaptations and the household member numbers meet the required allocation for each property and are registered on Lincs Homefinder awaiting housing of the type being exchanged.

Incentive payment

Payment will only be paid once the tenant has signed for the new tenancy and ended their former tenancy.

Deductions from payments

Where there are outstanding debts owed to the council, these will be deducted before any payment to the tenant(s). Examples of debts include:

- Rent arrears on current tenancy
- Former rent arrears
- Repairs which are the tenant's responsibility
- Damage to current property other than fair wear
- Removing/making good alterations made by the tenant which do not follow property standards
- Court costs
- Any other housing-related debt

Disruption payments will not be included in the total amount that any deduction is taken from. This is so that tenants are not placed in financial hardship by being unable to afford removal costs and flooring.

Decision making & appeal process

The original decision and any appeals will consider the tenant's history and current housing situation, bearing in mind that any payments or acceptance onto the scheme are at the discretion of the council.

Each application will be considered individually based on the household circumstances. Should there be any variations to the financial incentive amounts specified within this policy, this will form part of joined up decision making and appeals process.

The decision to accept a tenant onto the scheme and any variations to the offer will be made by an Area Housing Manager and Allocations Team Leader within 10 working days of receiving an application.

If a tenant is turned down for the scheme, an appeal can be made in writing to the Tenancy Services Manager who will review the application with the Assistant Director – Housing Management. A written response with the appeal decisions will be made within 20 working days.

This policy is an incentive scheme and not a core function of housing service delivery. Therefore, the process and its terms sit separately to the formal complaints process, and a complaint cannot be submitted if the tenant is unhappy with the decision made once the appeals process has been concluded.

Relevant Legislation, Regulation or Standards

This policy will follow all statutory, regulatory, and legal requirements, including but not limited to:

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Downsizing Scheme

A cost benefit analysis will be undertaken periodically to review and measure the scheme is delivering against the following outcomes:

- Number of known under occupiers reduce because of the scheme
- Larger properties are freed up because of this scheme
- Adapted properties freed up by the scheme
- Any reduction in temporary accommodation costs linked to this scheme and relets
- An improved flow of housing voids becoming from letting of the larger property
- Any reduction in City of Lincoln Council tenants in receipt of long term DHP (Discretionary Housing Payments) for under occupation of the same size properties

Related documents

- Allocations Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Income Management and Arrears Policy
- Tenancy Policy
- Aids and Adaptions Policy
- Mutual Exchange, Assignment and Sub-Letting Policy
- Housing Tenancy Fraud Policy

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