

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Trafford Housing Trust recognises that there may be times when applicants who are in need of rehousing as a priority may not fall into any of the Housing Waiting List categories.
- 1.2 The banding scheme used by Trafford Housing Trust in assessing housing need, is intended to cover the vast majority of applicants. The banding system takes into account, for example, factors such as overcrowding, homelessness, health and social factors. No scheme, however, can anticipate every eventuality.
- 1.3 Trafford Housing Trust will consider an application for rehousing as a “special case” if there are exceptional circumstances which are not taken into account within the Lettings policy or any other policy adopted by Trafford Housing Trust, such as Domestic Violence, Racial Harassment or Neighbour Nuisance.

2. Aims

- 2.1 This policy guidance is to ensure that all applicants approaching Trafford Housing Trust for consideration under this exceptional circumstances policy are treated in a fair, equitable and accountable way.
- 2.2 This will be achieved by:
 - Standardising the referral form
 - Involving only senior officers who have had no prior involvement with the case
 - Making one ‘Nominated Officer’ the custodian of the policy and procedure
 - Ensuring that accurate and meaningful records of applications and decisions are kept and maintained for audit purpose, easier retrieval when dealing with enquiries or reviews and for performance monitoring.

3. Policy statement

3.1 The range of Senior Officers on the panel will be:

- A NHM/Housing Support Manager for looking at sustainability, social mix and the Management issues around the case
- The GNU Manager who will be responsible for considering any risks involved to the applicant or the community at large
- An officer from Housing Options team who will look at homelessness prevention and legislation around the particular application.

3.2 Meetings will be held monthly, on a pre-organised cycle.

3.3 There will be provision for emergency meetings if an application is serious enough that it cannot wait.

3.4 The Nominated Officer is responsible for ensuring the matters raised in the referral are pertinent and cannot be dealt with under any other policy/procedure guidance.

3.5 The submitting officer may ask or be asked to attend the panel meeting to discuss the case more thoroughly.

3.6 There must be no reference to any name or address within the submitting document.

3.7 Panels have up to 10 working days to make a decision. In the absence of all relevant information a decision can be deferred to the next meeting.

3.8 Once a decision is made the applicant must be advised in three working days.

3.9 If no decision is reached there is provision for another panel to be convened within five working days. This panel will contain officers of equal standing as before but with no prior knowledge of the case.

3.10 The Nominated Officer is responsible for ensuring that there will be no adverse risk to the applicant whilst waiting for a panel hearing. The Nominated Officer will consult with the GNU where appropriate.

- 3.11 The panel can make a variety of decisions. The panel must be satisfied that the decision can achieve a result within a reasonable period of time. Such decisions will take into consideration the urgency of the case, the preferred property type/location desired, the realistic likelihood of a quick offer, the attempts at self help (bidding for all suitable properties as they arise for example). The Nominated Officer will provide details of current applicants positions at the top of the waiting list, their reasons for approval and their current length of wait for the required property.
- 3.12 This panel will form the statutory review for homeless applicants who have been rejected at the point of re housing by Trafford Housing Trust. Representation must be made from the Council in cases such as this.
- 3.13 All applicants have the right in this policy to a review of the panel's decision, including homeless applicants who have had their statutory review heard by this panel.
- 3.14 Requests for a review must be in writing and received within 21 days.
- 3.15 Reviews are heard by the Head of Housing or equivalent.
- 3.16 This review decision is final and there are no further review rights.

4. Equal opportunities

- 4.1 This policy aims to promote equal opportunities and work towards the elimination of discrimination against people on the basis of race, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or any other grounds that may lead to a person being treated less favourably than others.
- 4.2 This policy will adhere to Trafford Housing Trusts good practice in relation to equality of opportunity.
- 4.3 Information will be available in a variety of languages, in a variety of places and in a variety of ways.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Trafford Housing Trust welcomes comments and suggestions from all stakeholders and will actively encourage consultation on this policy and associated procedure in a variety of ways, including
- The Tenants Federation
 - Service Review groups established with tenants and other stakeholders who either use the service or are affected by it
 - As part of any formal and wide ranging consultation in the future about the allocations and lettings policies and procedures in the future.

6. Responsibility

- 6.1 It is the responsibility of the Head of Housing to ensure that staff are given the opportunity to undertake training around this policy and be notified promptly of any changes to it in the future.
- 6.2 The officers who are likely to be invited to sit on the panel are responsible for ensuring they are aware of all policies and procedures that could affect an application, and for deploying the policy as fairly and accurately as possible.
- 6.3 All submitting officers are responsible for ensuring they only use contemporaneous information and are aware of all other policies and procedures that could have a bearing on the application.

7. Review

- 7.1 This policy will be reviewed in 2 years time to ensure it still meets the needs of applicants and the Council and after the impact on the Housing Waiting List can be assessed fully.