

# MERLIN HOUSING SOCIETY

## UNDEROCCUPATION 'INCENTIVE TO MOVE' POLICY



### 1. INTRODUCTION

Our vision and one of our key objectives is to be “a first class provider of affordable housing and related services for communities across South Gloucestershire with residents at the heart of all that we do.”

We recognise that we need to make the best possible use of our housing stock. Once an applicant signs a Merlin tenancy agreement, they are entitled to remain at that property unless there is a breach of tenancy conditions. In many cases circumstances will change, for example, children may move out of their parent’s property leaving the parents with a property that is too big for their needs.

In these situations, we offer a cash incentive to help them move to more suitably sized accommodation. This in turn will help to free up larger properties for those who need them.

### 2. PURPOSE

The policy has been developed to reflect our role as a social landlord to ensure that we make the best use of our stock and help tackle homelessness within South Gloucestershire by increasing the amount of family sized accommodation that we have available. The policy covers the following:

- Who is eligible
- What is offered
- How we will promote the scheme

### 3. LEGAL & REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

There are a range of regulatory requirements surrounding tenancy management, including the Key Lines of Enquiry and this policy has been developed to meet these requirements. An incentive scheme helping us to release larger properties and is considered good practice.

### 4. WHO IS ELIGIBLE

A property is considered under-occupied if one or more bedrooms are not being occupied. Any tenants who have at least one room unoccupied may benefit under this scheme. However they will only be entitled to the incentive in the following cases:

- Our tenant must have our permission to swop properties with another tenant under a mutual exchange, and the property that they are moving to must have less bedrooms than the existing property. The scheme can only apply to our tenant and the larger property that is being released must belong to Merlin Housing Society. In line with our Mutual Exchange & Succession Policy, we will not allow a mutual exchange to take place if there has been a breach of tenancy, or if any debts exist until they have been cleared (Please refer to our Succession & Mutual exchange policy for further information).

- Alternative more suitable accommodation must have been formally offered to our tenant after applying to South Gloucestershire Council Home Choice. The property they are moving to must have fewer bedrooms than they currently have and belong to Merlin Housing Society or another Housing Association or Local Authority. In line with our lettings and allocations process, we will not allow the tenant to transfer to another of our properties where there are current arrears of rent, or where any other debt is owed to us.

## **5. WHAT IS OFFERED**

We accept that it is difficult for many families to move, and financially it may be impossible. Our Incentive to Move Scheme provides a cash payment to eligible tenants who are under occupying to help them move into smaller accommodation and release larger properties for families. We will provide a total of £2500 to tenants who move under the scheme.

### **5.1 MUTUAL EXCHANGE**

If the tenant is moving under a mutual exchange and meets the criteria as outlined in section 4 of this policy, the full payment of £2500 will be provided when the tenants officially sign the Deed of Assignment and the exchange has been completed.

### **5.2 TRANSFER TO ANOTHER MERLIN PROPERTY**

If the tenant is formally offered another property by Merlin Housing Society, £1250 will be provided on receipt of the notice to terminate their existing tenancy. The remaining amount will be provided at the 4 week follow up visit at the new tenancy. Where there is a debt payable to us following the termination of the old tenancy, this will be cleared using money from the remaining £1250. A cheque for any remaining amount will then be provided to the tenant.

### **5.3 TRANSFER TO A PROPERTY WITH ANOTHER LANDLORD**

If the tenant is formally offered a property with another landlord, £1250 will be provided at the receipt of the notice to terminate their existing tenancy and a copy of the formal offer of the new accommodation. After the tenant has moved to their new accommodation and on receipt of a copy of a signed tenancy agreement with the new landlord, we will pay the remaining amount. Where there is a debt payable to us at the end of the tenancy, this will be cleared using money from the £1250. A cheque for any remaining amount will then be provided.

## **6. CONTROL MEASURES**

Any payment in relation to this policy will only be made following approval by the Service Delivery Manager.

Where a payment has been provided and the tenant does not move, the amount will become repayable within 7 days. If payment is not received, we will take legal action to recover the payment.

## **7. PROMOTING THE SCHEME**

Full details of the scheme can be found in our leaflet 'Helping you to move to smaller accommodation' booklet available in our area offices and on our website. We will promote this scheme to all of our customers, particularly where:

- an elderly or disabled tenant is finding it difficult to live in a property that is larger than they need;
- a tenant informs us that the property is larger than they need;
- it comes to our attention that a property is under occupied;
- a property is under occupied after a spouse, civil partner or cohabitee by law succeeds to the tenancy on the tenant's death and has a right to the tenancy at that address.

## **8. OTHER POLICIES**

Please also refer to our Mutual Exchange and Lettings policies and procedures.

## **9. VALUE FOR MONEY**

We will endeavour to ensure our services are delivered economically, effectively, and efficiently.

## **10. CONSULTATION**

Residents, staff, stakeholders and partner agencies were consulted on this policy and will be consulted on any substantive changes.

## **11. CUSTOMER CARE & ACCESS**

We will ensure that we provide the highest level of customer care possible when delivering this policy to our customers.

## **12. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

We will ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently to all our residents. We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people in accordance with our equality and diversity policy.

We will act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and communities and we will take positive action to reduce discrimination and harassment.

This policy is available on request in other formats (for example in an alternative language, in Braille, on tape, in large type).

## **13. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITY & AUTHORITY**

Front line staff have professional, individual and collective responsibility to implement the policy, with guidance and advice from the Service Delivery Manager as necessary.

## **14. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & REVIEW**

The Customer Service Manager and Head of Housing will monitor the effectiveness of this policy, taking into account customer and staff feedback. The policy will be reviewed annually to build upon its performance.

**This policy is linked to Merlin Housing Society's Business Plan.**

**Corporate Reference:**

**Cross references:**

**This version:** September 2009

**Next review:**

**Lead Officer:** Housing Policy Advisor