



HOUSING NEEDS & ACCESS TO HOUSING POLICY

Originator:	Policy and Strategy Team
Approval date:	5 th July 2022
Review date:	July 2025

1	Introduction
1.1	Pine Court Housing Association (PCHA) was originally established to provide quality homes and housing services for those in need, with a specific focus on the Chinese and South East Asian communities. PCHA also provides bi-lingual services which enable Chinese speakers to access the full range of services and facilities available across Merseyside.
1.2	The Policy sets out how PCHA will allocate its properties to people with greatest need whilst making best use of its stock.
1.3	In addition to a specific focus on the Chinese and South East Asian communities, PCHA also aims to provide accommodation to those in housing need.
1.4	The application of this Policy also ensures compliance with the outcomes of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England, responsibility of the Regulator for Social Housing as outlined below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how their lettings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) make the best use of available housing and are compatible with the purpose of the housing (b) contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities
1.5	Access and Communication
1.5.1	PCHA is committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to everyone. PCHA will seek alternative methods of access and service delivery where barriers, perceived or real may exist, that may make it difficult for people to work for PCHA or its services.

1.5.2	Working with our customers we have established a Vulnerable Persons and Reasonable Adjustments Policy to ensure we make best use of every customer interaction to meet customers' needs in our service delivery and ensure this information is kept up to date.
1.6	Equality, Diversity and Human Rights
1.6.1	PCHA is committed to ensuring that no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons and will carry out its duty with positive regard for the following core strands of equality; Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Gender Identity /Gender Expression, Sexual Orientation, Maternity and Pregnancy, Civil Partnership and Marriage, Religion and/or Belief.
1.6.2	PCHA also recognise that some people experience disadvantage due to their socio-economic circumstances, employment status, class, appearance, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or with AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.
1.6.3	PCHA will also ensure that all services and actions are delivered within the context of current Human Rights legislation. Staff and others with whom PCHA works, will adhere to the central principles of the Human Rights Act (1998).
1.7	<p>This Policy should be read in conjunction with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCHA Complaints, Appeals and Feedback Policy • PCHA Tenancy Transfer, Succession and Mutual Exchanges Policy • PCHA Anti-Fraud, Corruption and Money Laundering Policy
2	Statement of intent
2.1	PCHA will ensure the process of allocating properties is fair, transparent and easily accessible.
2.2	PCHA will work with local authorities in areas it operates (i.e. Liverpool City Council and Wirral Borough Council) to assist them in fulfilling their statutory duty by offering accommodation to those with priority housing need.
2.3	PCHA will empower applicants by giving them an opportunity to express choice and preferences about where they want to live.
2.4	PCHA will work with other registered social landlords in Merseyside to improve access to housing and increase choices for applicants.
2.5	PCHA will ensure that it allocates housing to people with greatest need whilst making best use of its stock.
2.6	PCHA reserves the right to operate its own waiting list and allocate properties according to published criteria.
2.7	PCHA will endeavour to allocate properties that meets the needs or exceed the expectations of its customers.

3	Policy
3.1	PCHA will endeavour to use its own waiting list to allocate all available properties. However, PCHA will advertise homes through the Merseyside Property Pool Plus (PPP) if they fail to be let via the waiting list.
3.2	PCHA Waiting List
3.2.1	Applicants can register to be on the PCHA’s waiting list by completing a housing application form and submitting it to PCHA offices.
3.3	Who can apply?
3.3.1	<p>PCHA will allow housing applications from any one aged 16 or over, subject to the following restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants who are 16 and 17 years old can only apply to join PCHA’s Waiting List if they are care leavers with relevant support package and are ready for independent living • Applicants subject to some aspects of immigration control, who do not have recourse to public funds or who cannot prove they have recourse to public funds will not be considered for housing
3.3.2	After receiving an application form, PCHA will assess each applicant for eligibility and carry out background and affordability checks. This will include the requirement for the applicant and all household members included in the application to provide proof of identity (i.e. birth certificate, passport, and driving licence) and evidence of their circumstances including references from previous landlords, if applicable.
3.3.3	<p>If the application is successful, PCHA may award points according to the housing need of the applicant, which is based on eight main categories of priority need. The points scored will decide the total point’s level and an applicant’s position on the waiting list. The following are the categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security of tenure:- If an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness • Household amenities: - Living in an accommodation that has poor condition that lacks basic amenities as verified by the PCHA Housing Officer e.g. shower, toilet etc • Occupancy:- Overcrowding and under occupying • Local connection:- Closer to work or family and friends • Medical and support needs:- Includes a range of health and social well-being circumstances including advanced age and need to move due to medical condition • Miscellaneous:-Includes suffering from domestic violence ,harassment, suffering from Anti-Social Behaviour and going through divorce proceedings • Time on the list:- The length of time on the waiting list
3.4	Existing tenants
3.4.1	Existing tenants are eligible to apply to move and their application will be assessed in the same way as the other applicants unless they are subject to overcrowding or under-occupying or there are medical and support needs or experiencing harassment/domestic violence.

3.4.2	<p>Existing PCHA tenants who wish to initiate a tenancy transfer will not be allowed to join the waiting list if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are in rent arrears or housing related debt (unless they clear the debt) • They are in breach of tenancy conditions and PCHA has started formal legal action • They live in a property that has been adapted to their needs (Unless they no longer require the adaptation or are applying to move to another property with similar adaptation) • They are demoted tenant
3.4.3	<p>PCHA reserves the right to use its discretion to authorise tenancy transfers as a means of dealing with housing management issues and may move people who would not normally qualify for a move (with their consent) i.e. those experiencing domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour.</p>
3.5	<p>Applications from Sovini employees/Board members and their families</p>
3.5.1	<p>PCHA will allow employees and Board members (this includes Sovini employees and board members) to apply for housing provided they are eligible to do so.</p>
3.5.2	<p>If an employee or a board member applies for PCHA housing, the following requirements must be met in order to ensure fairness and transparency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They must complete a declaration form to disclose their interest or connection • They must demonstrate that they meet all the selection criteria PCHA may use to decide to offer accommodation
3.6	<p>Where an application is from an employee or a board member, PCHA will ensure that the application is processed in fair and transparent manner without any favouritism.</p>
3.7	<p>PCHA will give all applicants an opportunity to express choice and preference of up to three areas/or streets they wish to apply for a property. Where an applicant state areas of preference they will only be offered a property that meets their choice.</p>
3.8	<p>PCHA will inform the applicant(s) in writing as to whether or not their application has been successful. If an applicant has been accepted onto the waiting list, the letter will include information about their area of choice and what happens next.</p>
3.9	<p>Suspension from the list:</p>
3.9.1	<p>Dependent on the merits of each application, PCHA will consider suspending applicants from the waiting list for three months if it has evidence that the applicant(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have had action taken against them for anti-social behaviour • Have convictions for possession of offensive weapons • Have been evicted from a previous tenancy • Have action against them for supplying drugs • Have a current or former tenant debt • Have misrepresented their circumstances in order to obtain a tenancy
3.9.2	<p>After 3 months suspension, PCHA will review the case to determine whether the applicant:</p>

- Can demonstrate that they will not cause anti-social behaviour and stay free from crime (i.e. harassment, nuisance, supplying drugs)
- Will be able to maintain the new tenancy in an acceptable manner
- Have cleared any current or former tenant debts

3.10 **Property Offers and Viewing**

3.10.1 Under normal circumstances, PCHA will offer a property to applicants who have the most points on the waiting list (determined by housing need) and provided their application form indicates that they:

- Require that size of the property
- Requested that geographical area

3.10.2 If two or more applicants are 'equal' in terms of their level of points, PCHA will offer the property to the person who has been on the waiting list the longest.

3.10.3 Prior to making an offer, PCHA will reassess eligibility and verify circumstances of the applicant to ensure that they still meet the necessary requirements. This may include making a visit to the applicant's current home or requesting for further information from the applicant, if required.

3.10.4 PCHA allows applicants up to two offers of housing that corresponds with their need. If an offer has been refused, PCHA will consult with the applicant to establish the reasons for the refusal are taken into account before making a further offer. If the applicant refuses the second offer, PCHA will seek reasons for the refusal, which will be taken into consideration when reviewing their application to establish if their circumstances have changed.

3.11 On the annual anniversary of each application, PCHA will contact all applicants who have not been offered a property in the last 12 months, asking them to renew their application. If they want to remain on the waiting list, PCHA will require applicants to provide information about any changes in circumstances that could affect their application. PCHA will review the status of the applicants who fail to respond to the contact and/or cancel the application, if necessary.

3.12 **Property Pool Plus**

3.12.1 PCHA will allocate properties through the sub-regional choice based letting scheme (i.e. Property Pool Plus) if it fails to let them through its own waiting list. Where PCHA allocates properties through the Merseyside Property Pool Plus Policy it will adhere to all legal and regulatory requirements including the local authorities' conditions in areas it operates.

3.13 **Appeals Process**

3.13.1 PCHA permit housing applicants to appeal for the following decisions:

- Their application has been suspended or cancelled
- They were offered a property that did not match the choices on your application
- They were offered a property; which they felt was not in an acceptable condition

3.13.2	If applicants want to appeal against any decisions (as mentioned in 3.13.3) that PCHA has made in relation to their housing application, they must do so within 21 days of the receiving a notification of the decision they are appealing for.
3.13.3	PCHA will acknowledge receipt of all appeals in writing within 3 working days and arrange for the decision to be reviewed by a panel comprised of a more senior officer than the one who made the original decision and an alternative officer (both with experience and knowledge of the relevant service area under review).
3.13.4	Applicants may make representation by way of written submission or choose to attend panel hearings in person, where they may be accompanied by a person of their choice (including legal representation).
3.13.5	Where an oral hearing is requested, PCHA will notify the tenant of the date, time and place of the hearing and provide a summary of information to be considered by the panel within 5 working days of the notification of the hearing.
3.13.6	Applicants who choose to attend the panel hearing, should submit copies to PCHA of any evidence they intend to use at the hearing (written and photographic evidence) 48 hours in advance of the meeting.
3.13.7	PCHA will inform the customer the outcome of the review within seven days of the hearing. For further details please refer to the PCHA Appeals Policy.
4	Implementation
4.1	All PCHA staff members need to have an awareness of the PCHA Housing Need and Access to Housing Policy to be able to direct any customer queries that arise.
5	Performance
5.1	All performance information in regard to PCHA Housing Need and Access to Housing Policy will annually be reviewed by the Departmental Management Team (DMT), who will monitor any performance trends.
6	Consultation
6.1	All PCHA staff have been consulted in the development of this Policy. PCHA Customer Empowerment Panel was also be consulted about this Policy on 6 th July 2022.
7	Review
7.1	The Policy will be reviewed every three years from or as near as possible from the date of Operations Director's approval. The review process will ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness or as required by the introduction of new legislation or regulation that impacts on PCHA's obligations in regard to allocations, changes to business practices or in the light of management system audits.

8		Equality Impact Assessment	
8.1	Was a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) required?	No	
8.2	When was EIA conducted and by who?	The EIA Relevance Test conducted by the Policy Writer and Policy and Strategy Manager in May 2022 is still relevant for this Policy.	
8.3	Results of EIA	The EIA Relevance Test did not indicate any adverse or differential impacts for any group of people with protected characteristics.	
9		Scheme of delegation	
9.1	Responsible committee for approving and monitoring implementation of the Policy and any amendments to it	PCHA- DMT	
9.2	Responsible officer for formulating Policy and reporting to committee on its effective implementation	Operations Director-PCHA	
9.3	Responsible officer for formulating, reviewing and monitoring implementation of procedures	Operations Director-PCHA	
10		Amendment log	
Date of revision:	Reason for revision:	Consultation record:	Record of amendments:
25 th April 2019	In line with the Review Schedule	See Section 6	There are no significant changes to the Policy.
23 rd April 2020	In line with the Review Schedule	See Section 6	The Policy now includes applicants' affordability checks
11 th May 2021	In line with the Review Schedule	See Section 6	There are no significant changes to the Policy.
5 th July 2022	In line with the Review Schedule	See Section 6	There are no significant changes to the Policy.