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# How to become a Tenant

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## **How to Become a Tenant**

### **Service Standards for Housing Options and Voids & Allocations Service**

#### **AT YOUR SERVICE**

Our Housing Options and Voids & Allocation Services help the council meet its corporate priorities around improving housing and ensuring that there is affordable housing for local people. This information explains the standards you can expect from us.

#### **WHAT DO WE DO?**

- Housing Options is part of the Housing Services Division. The team is responsible for providing people with options for re-housing, for example through the allocation of our own accommodation or referral to a Housing Association. The team also deals with the registration and assessment of housing application forms.
- Every year, many people ask us for help with housing. We have a whole range of different types of accommodation throughout the borough such as houses, flats and maisonettes. There are areas within West Lancashire however whereby applicants may need to wait some time for accommodation, owing to the popularity of that area and in some cases the lack of suitable properties in that part of the borough. We can't offer a home to everyone who asks for help, so we have a system for deciding who we can give properties to. We help people register with us for accommodation in the district and we assess their housing need.
- The Voids and Allocation Team deal with the management and maintenance of the council's empty homes. In line with the council's Allocation Policy the team determines who empty homes should be allocated to and arranges and carries out accompanied viewings and tenancy sign ups.

## **OUR SERVICE PROMISE**

### **Applying for a home**

- When you contact us about how to register for accommodation, a member of the Housing Options Team will answer your query.
- We will discuss your needs in detail and advise you of the options available to you. If you are homeless, you will be provided with the number for the Homelessness Advice & Prevention Team.
- We aim to register all housing applications and change of circumstances within 10 working days.
- We aim to achieve the highest standards but there may be occasions where delays may be experienced. This may be because we require information from other people, for example your doctor, before we can assess your case. Supporting information will be dealt with within 10 days although individual items of evidence will not be acknowledged.
- If we need to visit you to assess medical, social/welfare need or overcrowding the visit will be carried out within 20 working days.
- You have the right to appeal against any decision we make about your application. You have 21 days from receiving the decision, to appeal, in writing, to the Service Manager. You will then have 20 working days to provide any supporting information. The Service Manager will then review your case and write to you with the review decision within 10 working days.

### **Ending your tenancy**

- If you tell us that you want to end your tenancy, a Housing Officer will visit you within 10 days. The officer will offer advice about what you need to do before you leave. We will provide written notification of the time and date of the visit.

### **Empty Property Management**

- We aim to inspect all empty properties within 2 days of receipt of the keys from the outgoing tenant. All repair work is then undertaken prior to reletting. Empty properties are categorised according to the amount of work needed and we aim to carry out repair work within the following target times

Category A Void – 5 days  
Category B Void - 7 days  
Category C Void – 10 days

Properties needing extensive or structural works may take longer.

- All properties undergo gas and electrical safety checks and a copy of the safety certificates are provided to the new tenant when they view their new home, along with a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate.
- Following the completion of repairs, every empty home is inspected by the councils surveyor to ensure that it complies with our Relet Standard. A copy of the standard is provided with every offer of accommodation and at each property viewing.

### **Offers of accommodation**

- We aim to pre allocate all our properties within 5 days of being notified that they may become empty. Offers at this stage are made on a provisional basis and could be withdrawn.
- When an offer is refused, the property will be reoffered within 2 working days, unless the property is ready for occupation, in which case it will be reoffered immediately.
- All formal offers will be made in writing, however to avoid delay, an applicant may initially be contacted by telephone. All offer letters will provide the address of the property, details about the size and type of home, breakdown of rent and service charges, and explain how to accept or refuse the offer.
- You will be given 2 working days to respond to an offer, if we have not heard from you after this time, the property will be offered to another applicant.

### **Property viewings**

- As soon as the property is ready for occupation you will be contacted to arrange a convenient time for you to view.
- When viewing a property you will be accompanied by a member of staff from our Voids and Allocations Team, who will be able to provide advice and answer any queries you may have. If the property is in one of our sheltered housing schemes, the Scheme Manager will also be present.

- You will normally be expected to make your decision during the viewing, however if this is not possible, up to 2 days may be allowed.

### **Tenancy Sign Up**

- An appointment to sign up will be made at the accompanied viewing, and will normally take place the day after, at either your current home or the councils Customer Service Point.

### **HOW YOU CAN HELP US**

- Please complete all sections of the application as accurately as possible, and provide a reference and photographic proof of identity.
- Please provide any supporting information as quickly as possible.
- When you contact us, please have your application number ready.
- Please make sure you are home for any home visit that is arranged.
- Please let us know at least 24 hours before if you are unable to keep a home visit.
- Please respond to offers of accommodation as soon as you can even if you are not interested in the property, as this will mean the property can be offered to someone else.
- We are happy to assist all of our customers with special needs. Please mention any needs you may have to our staff when you contact us.

### **OUR GENERAL STANDARDS**

We have a number of general standards, which apply to all services across West Lancashire Borough Council. You may find these useful to note:

- We aim to answer letters and emails within 10 working days.
- We aim to answer your phone calls within 10 seconds
- At all times our staff will show courtesy, respect and sensitivity.
- To view our general standards in full visit [www.westlancs.gov.uk/performance](http://www.westlancs.gov.uk/performance).

## **GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK**

We want to provide services that delight our customers and which are second to none. We monitor the standards we set but also value feedback from our customers and residents on how we can further improve services. If you have any **comments, compliments or complaints**, there is a form on which you can make any suggestions. These are available by downloading a copy from our website or by visiting our main offices. Alternatively you can call Customer Services and one of our advisers will complete a form with you over the phone. If you do make a complaint about our services, please note that we have a formal process for dealing with these. These should initially be addressed to the service manager whose details are given below. Our promise to you is that any complaint will be answered within **10 working days**.

### **New Tenant Satisfaction Survey**

All new tenants will receive a satisfaction survey at the tenancy sign up. This can be returned in the prepaid envelope supplied or given to the Housing Officer at the New Tenant Visit. The survey gathers views about the whole service from application stage to moving into your new home. Feedback from the survey is used to develop and improve the service.

## **CONTACTING US**

Click: [www.westlancsdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.westlancsdc.gov.uk/housing)

Email: [housingoptions@westlancs.gov.uk](mailto:housingoptions@westlancs.gov.uk) or  
[voidsandallocationsteam@westlancs.gov.uk](mailto:voidsandallocationsteam@westlancs.gov.uk)

Call: 01695 577177

Come in: 52 Derby Street, Ormskirk

Or the CSP at the Concourse, Skelmersdale

Our offices are open from 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Thursday, and 9.00am to 4.45pm on Friday.

Our Customer Contact Centre is open from 8.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday for telephone calls.

We can provide this information upon request on audiotape, in large print, in Braille and in other languages.

March 2010

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