



Letting Policy

Policy Statement

The purpose of the Lettings Policy is to set out rules for allocating Care Ashore housing which are fair, transparent and auditable. It determines who can apply for housing, the way need is assessed, who can be offered different types of accommodation and when that will happen.

It is the role of the Office/Housing Administrator to record applications and maintain the housing waiting list. The Chief Executive is ultimately responsible for the management of the Letting Policy, which includes the allocation of vacant properties following the interview process.

1. Care Ashore's Houses, Cottages, Bungalows and Flats

- 1.1 Care Ashore is a registered charity that provides services to seafarers in need. The charity does this largely through the ownership and management of Springbok Estate, Alfold, Surrey and we now care for nearly 270 acres of land. The charity's properties include farm buildings and structures, business units, cottages, bungalows, houses and flats.
- 1.2 A number of dwellings have been acquired as part of the Springbok Estate, to be used to accommodate staff/estate workers to ensure they deliver the charity's services efficiently. Whilst some dwellings are let to non-beneficiaries as a way of securing income to support the charity's objectives.
- 1.3 Care Ashore provides the majority of its dwellings as social housing for its seafaring beneficiaries; the organisation is in principle a provider of sheltered/supported housing. In these cases the charity makes the allocating and management of the lets in line with the objectives of the charity.
- 1.4 8 of the 59 residential dwellings the charity manage are occupied by staff either as "tied accommodation" or through a rental arrangement, depending on their role within the organisation. There are also 8 dwellings let to non-beneficiaries and staff, these are known as investment properties and provide income to support the charity's objectives.

2. Care Ashore's Objectives for Housing

- To safeguard the physical fabric of its houses, cottages, bungalows and flats to ensure a safe and comfortable environment.
- To further the charity's work within the maritime charity sector, plus within the local community through a selection of private and staff tenancies that will provide the appropriate skills and community spirit to support the charity's objectives.

- To generate rental income to support the charity's objectives.
- To help meet identified seafarers social housing needs.
- Where possible, to favour those making a contribution to the community of Care Ashore.

3. Management Principles for Housing

- 3.1 All of Care Ashore's properties are different. Each has its own character and individual circumstances. This is the very diversity of the seafaring community, plus the local distinctiveness that the charity celebrates and protects through its work. It is not appropriate therefore to impose a central policy to be applied rigidly to all dwellings.
- 3.2 As a charity Care Ashore is obliged to make the best use of its assets for the furtherance of the charity's core purpose; to support seafarers and their dependents in need. We must therefore start from a presumption of a full market rent for all lettings. Any discount from market rents must be justified in terms of a clear benefit it brings to meeting the charity's objectives and must be proportionate to that benefit.
- 3.3 Ideally, decisions on housing applications should be by staff on the ground and where necessary, local judgement will need to be applied. However, in order to promote a more consistent approach the following management principles have been identified to provide a framework for local decision making. These reflect the charity's overall objectives for its housing referred to above, and have been developed drawing on the feedback arising from an internal and external housing consultation process.

4. Rents

- 4.1 Care Ashore will adopt the general presumption that the dwellings will be let at the prevailing open market rate ('market lettings'). This will reflect any inherent disadvantages or benefits of the property, and the terms of the tenancy.
- 4.2 Care Ashore will consider lettings at less than the open market ('non-market lettings') in the following circumstances;
- Where the charity identifies itself as a significant housing provider; i.e., lets to seafaring beneficiaries.
 - Where it is in the charity's best interests to let to someone who brings skills needed for its work and for whom local accommodation would otherwise be unaffordable. Rental levels will be set locally to reflect the value of the benefit provided to the charity's work, or in accordance with the charity's staff housing policy as appropriate.
- 4.3 Where Care Ashore has identified itself as a housing provider it will establish the proportion of the housing stock which can contribute to the provision of social housing to meet the beneficiaries need. This will be established in consultation with the local authority and other housing providers as appropriate. Rents for social housing will be set taking into account local assessments of affordability undertaken by the District Council and relevant housing associations. Both the proportion and rental levels will be kept under review as circumstances change.
- 4.4 Rent reviews will be undertaken in accordance with the terms of individual tenancy agreements. Where a proposed increase is particularly high due to the current rent being well below the appropriate rate, the increase may be stepped in order to reduce the

impact on the tenant. The period and phasing of the steps will be negotiated locally to reflect the circumstances of the letting and the tenant.

5. Selection of Tenants (Beneficiary, Staff, Private)

- 5.1 Care Ashore will as a matter of course; first consider the need to house seafarers, when assessing tenants for vacant properties. If operational purposes dictate, the need to house staff may need to be taken into consideration, if deemed necessary. The needs of existing tenants who may wish to relocate to more suitable accommodation within the community will also be taken into account.
- 5.2 Prospective tenants that meet the criteria will be offered an appointment for a housing assessment. During the appointment Care Ashore staff will discuss your current circumstances and housing need. Factors that will be taken into account when deciding whether a prospective tenant meets the charity's criteria include:
- The ability of the applicant to pay the rent and running costs of the property (determined through and affordability assessment, financial references and credit checks).
 - The compatibility of the applicant with the nature of the property e.g., its locations, size, number of rooms, accessibility, garage/parking, garden etc.
 - The need for the applicant to be sympathetic to the nature and situation of the property and the charity's aims to protect its character.
- 5.3 Where, for any particular letting (either market or non-market), Care Ashore has a choice of prospective applicants who meet the above criteria equally well, the following categories will generally be favoured;
- Seafarers and/or their dependants in need.
 - People employed by the charity, or in employment locally or who provide important local services.
 - People who can demonstrate a commitment to the community at Care Ashore, through support of its objectives in fulfilling community inclusion.
 - People who have family living in the locality.
- 5.4 These criteria may be varied or given different weightings according to local circumstances and local needs. Where this is the case the relevant criteria will be set out by the management following consultation with the charity trustees. In the event where an applicant has a family connection with a staff member, a trustee will be required to undertake the selection process with a relevant staff member.

6. Affordability

For all potential tenancies, Care Ashore will conduct an affordability assessment of income (including benefits). Where a property is deemed as unaffordable, we may have to refuse the application. Applicants should discuss any concerns they may have about affordability with the Office/Housing Administrator. As a responsible landlord we need to be confident that our tenants will be able to meet their rent payments comfortably and within their budget. Understanding an applicant situation at the earliest possible stage allows us to provide support and advice to get your tenancy right. Care Ashore want to avoid tenants putting themselves into a position where they cannot afford the rent, and therefore put their tenancy at risk.

7. Deciding not to offer a property to an applicant

Care Ashore will consider every applicant's individual circumstances before making any decisions; each one will be based on its own merits. However, if we decide not to offer a tenancy to an applicant we will explain our reasons clearly, as well as what the applicant needs to do in order to be re-considered in future, we will also confirm our decision in writing. We will not usually offer a property to applicants who have a history of anti-social or unacceptable behaviour. All relevant circumstances will be considered and we will examine the strength of the evidence against the applicant and his or her household when making a decision.

8. Waiting List

Care Ashore operates a waiting list for its long term and Private Rented Accommodation (PRA). All applicants are required to complete an application form. Following an assessment, applicants will be advised if a suitable property is available. If a suitable property is not available, applicants will be asked if they wish to be placed on the waiting list.

9. Type of Tenancy to be offered

Most new PRA tenants will be given a 12 month fixed term Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST). All new long term accommodation tenants will be offered either an AST or License to Occupy agreement.

10. Relationships with Tenants

- 10.1 Care Ashore values the role of its tenants in the care of the buildings they occupy and want to build lasting relationships with good tenants. This will reduce turnover of occupiers, minimise empty properties and be a benefit to the property, the tenant, and the community. Where appropriate the charity will provide greater security to tenants where good relationships have been established.
- 10.2 The charity readily accepts a responsibility to be a fair and reasonable landlord and we will review the terms and conditions of our standard agreements in the light of contemporary practice to ensure that they reflect an equitable balance of rights and obligations.
- 10.3 Care Ashore will adopt an open and transparent approach to the management of our residential properties. We will establish clear and consistent processes for the letting of vacant properties, encourage the provision of information to tenants and provide mechanisms for feedback and complaints.
- 10.4 Care Ashore will aim to provide decent homes for people to live in and will set out the basic standard that it will strive to achieve. Improvements will not be imposed on tenants against their will, but properties will be upgraded as opportunities arise and resources permit. Arrangements for responding to defects will be improved where possible and the aim will be to provide better information on the planning and prioritisation of repairs and maintenance.

10.5 Care Ashore will not seek to become a Registered Social Landlord, as the charity has to balance its social obligations as a housing provider within its core and statutory responsibilities.

11. How we find beneficiaries / tenants:

Care Ashore finds new beneficiaries for its long term and Private Rented Accommodation by;

- Advertising on its own website, the Veterans Gateway and a number of maritime publications. It required, the PRA vacancies will be advertised on external property websites.

12. Working with Others

Care Ashore acknowledges that it is not alone in dealing with affordable social housing for seafarers. There are a number of maritime charity providers devoted to the issue, who have a great deal of expertise to draw on. Care Ashore will continue to nurture partnerships with our maritime charity sector colleagues to help fulfil our housing objectives.

13. Statement on GDPR and Freedom of Information

We recognise that applicants for housing entrust us with personal and sometimes sensitive information. We undertake to treat this with care and respect, and in particular we will a) Hold, retain and dispose of all information in accordance with current legislation b) Keep personal information secure and restrict access to it c) Enable the applicant to have access to their own information unless it is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and to correct any inaccuracies.

14. Appeals and Complaints

Applicants can appeal against a decision not to offer them a property, if they feel Care Ashore had not taken into account all relevant information and/or have made the decision unfairly. Appeals must be made within 5 working days from the date of the decision not to offer letter. Care Ashore will not hold any properties empty whilst the appeal is being considered. However, if the appeal is successful, we will seek to offer a suitable alternative property. The charity's Chairman, or a nominated trustee who was not involved in the original decision, will review the appeal. Applicants will be notified of the outcome in writing within 15 working days or within a mutually agreed timescale. If an applicant is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal review, they should notify Care Ashore within 5 working days from the date of the appeal response letter. The case would then be reviewed in line with our complaints policy. To appeal a decision, or make a complaint, contact us by telephone on 01403 752555, or by email to info@careashore.org

Date of last Review: 7th November 2019