



# Lancaster City Council

## Housing and Property: Council Housing

# Under-occupation Policy

July | 2024

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Effective from	July 2024
Approved by	JW
Review date	July 2026
Revision number:	1.0

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## 1. Introduction and Policy Objectives

- 1.1. The Lancaster district is currently seeing unprecedented demand for family accommodation, especially three- and four-bedroom houses. Lancaster City Council also have a number of Independent Living properties and bungalows within the district that regularly become available for reletting.
- 1.2. This policy details the incentives and support available to Lancaster City Council tenants to enable them to move to a smaller, more suitable property that will be beneficial to both them and the Council. The Council will support other social housing tenants within the district to move by giving them the appropriate priority as outlined in our Allocation Policy, but no financial assistance will be available to them.
- 1.3. The objective of this policy are to:
  - 1.3.1. Increase the supply of three- and four-bedroom family properties for households in high housing need within the district.
  - 1.3.2. Assist tenants who are struggling financially in their current under-occupied properties to move to more affordable properties.
  - 1.3.3. Assist tenants whose under-occupied properties no longer meet their physical needs.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to Lancaster City Council tenants within the district who have a need to move into smaller accommodation.

## 3. Criteria for downsizing incentives and assistance

- 3.1. To qualify for the scheme, tenants will need:
  - 3.1.1. To be secure tenants of Lancaster City Council
  - 3.1.2. To currently occupy a three, four or larger family home
  - 3.1.3. Have a clear rent account and no other social housing debt (e.g. court costs, recharges).
  - 3.1.4. Agree to move to a flat or bungalow (unless they are vacating an adapted house with a downstairs bedroom and bathroom and require two or more bedrooms (in these circumstances the property size should be smaller than the one currently occupied).
  - 3.1.5. Have their property inspected and any potential rechargeable repairs resolved prior to moving.
  - 3.1.6. To have not been served with a Notice of Seeking Possession or Demotion in relation to anti-social behaviour in the previous 12 months.

- 3.1.7. To not have previously received an under-occupation move payment.
- 3.2. If a tenant does not have a clear rent account, due to under-occupation and a reduction in the housing benefit or housing element of Universal Credit, our Income Management Team will Support them in an effort to resolve these issues.

## 4. Assistance Available

- 4.1. Assistance available to tenancies which meet the criteria are:
  - 4.1.1. Tenants will be provided with assistance to make an application to Ideal Choice Homes and bid for suitable properties.
  - 4.1.2. Tenants will also be offered a financial assessment with one of the Income Management Team to ensure they are claiming all the benefits they are entitled to and can make referrals to a relevant agency if they have any debt issues that need addressing.
  - 4.1.3. Tenants will be given assistance to apply for any other grants or discretionary funds to assist with the costs of moving that are available at the time of offer.
  - 4.1.4. Decorating vouchers will be provide if required. In addition, if an Independent Living property or bungalow requires decoration, we can undertake this instead of providing vouchers.

## 5. Incentives Available

- 5.1. Incentives available to tenancies which meet the criteria are:
  - 5.1.1. Lancaster City Council tenants who live in general needs properties that have two bedrooms more than they need, will be eligible for a £1000 incentive to move into a one-bedroom property.
  - 5.1.2. Lancaster City Council tenants who live in general needs properties and have three bedrooms more than they need, will be eligible for a £1500 incentive to move into a one-bedroom property.
  - 5.1.3. Lancaster City Council tenants who are in adapted three-, four- and five-bedroom properties, which no longer meet their families' requirements, with ground floor bedroom and bathroom extension, will be eligible for a £5000 incentive to move to standard general needs property.
  - 5.1.4. Tenants who are eligible for one of the above incentives, will be allocated a named officer who will assist them with moving. Assistance can be provided with arranging removals, the setting up of utility accounts, reconnecting appliances and any other tenancy support required.
- 5.2. Alternatively, tenants who meet the criteria for this policy can opt for their removal costs and costs of any flooring required to be paid by Lancaster City Council up to the value of the incentive they are offered. If the cost of removals and flooring is less than the incentive they are eligible for, then they can receive the remaining amount as a

payment into their nominated bank account.

## 6. Additional Incentives for Moving into Lancaster City Council Category Two Independent Living Schemes

6.1. Tenants who meet the above criteria as well as the criteria for Independent Living and move into one of our Independent Living (Cat 2) Schemes, will also be eligible for:

6.1.1. Additional £500 incentive

6.1.2. Two-hour handy person to assist with fitting curtain poles and bathroom accessories, hanging pictures and blinds.

## 7. Authorisation of Payments

7.1. Payments will be authorised once the tenant has moved and following an inspection of the vacated property.

7.2. If there are any arrears or recharges (repairs, rubbish removal etc) identified, then the cost of these will be deducted from the payment agreed. Tenants will be notified in writing to advise of these. There is no right of appeal, but tenants can make a formal complaint in line with our complaints policy.

## 8. Budget Limitations

8.1. The payments outlined will be subject to budget limits. If there are more requests for financial assistance than there is budget available, Council Housing Services will give priority in the following order to:

8.1.1. Those who will give up a four-bedroom property and move into Category Two Independent Living accommodation.

8.1.2. Those who will give up a four-bedroom property and move into a one or two-bedroom general needs property.

8.1.3. Those who will give up a fully adapted three or four-bedroom property with a downstairs bedroom and bathroom.

8.1.4. Those who will give up a three-bedroom property and move into Category Two Independent Living accommodation.

8.2. Those who will give up a three-bedroom property and move into a one-bedroom general needs property.

## 9. Discretionary Decisions

9.1. Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Council Housing reserves the right to offer properties directly, as per the Allocations Policy.

## 10. Review of Policy

- 10.1. The success of this policy will be monitored through the internal Allocations Policy Review Group.
- 10.2. The Under-occupation policy will be reviewed for effectiveness every two years, or sooner where required.

