

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
DRAFT
Rightsizing Transfer Scheme

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) aims to make best use of its housing stock and the Rightsizing Transfer Scheme aims to encourage, and assist, tenants to move to a home that suits their current needs. Particularly if their existing home may have become impractical for a variety of reasons, such as size, mobility, and changes in financial or family circumstances.

The scheme is discretionary and the final decision on a financial payment linked to a Rightsizing transfer must be made by the Housing Portfolio Manager or Neighbourhoods Team Leader.

There is a limited annual budget for the scheme and therefore any possible financial assistance under the scheme will be conditional on the availability of funds in the allocated budget and other scheme conditions.

Aims

- Make better use of our housing stock
- Reduce underoccupancy and free up larger family homes to prevent overcrowding and other housing needs in the area
- Reduce homelessness
- Address the impact of welfare reform
- Reduce financial hardship
- Promote independence
- Offer an incentive/financial assistance for under-occupiers thinking of moving

Eligibility

- WHBC tenants moving to a smaller home if this does not result in overcrowding or under-occupation as defined by the housing benefit under-occupation charge (bedroom tax).
- WHBC tenants who are affected by the under occupation charge and wish to move to a smaller property
- WHBC tenants who have not previously received a payment under this or a previous scheme.
- Tenants must have a clear rent account, except in some cases where they are affected by the bedroom tax or other financial hardship.
- Tenants returning their property to WHBC in a satisfactory condition, unless agreed due to exceptional circumstances.
- Tenants must not be subject to a valid notice of seeking possession, other than where there are exceptional circumstances which have been agreed by the Neighbourhood and Enforcement Manager or Service Director.

Only secure or fixed term tenants are eligible for help with the scheme. Non-secure tenants and those with a license agreement for their WHBC accommodation are not eligible for payment under the scheme.

Incentive

- Each eligible household, downsizing by one bedroom, will be paid £750 minimum payment.
- A further payment of £250 will be made for each additional bedroom released through the move.

Tenants with rent arrears

Usually, tenants would have to have a clear rent account prior to a transfer, but we will consider exceptional circumstances and in particular weigh up the benefit to the council of releasing a family sized home, where a tenant is down-sizing.

Where there are rent arrears, or associated debt, these would usually be deducted from the RTS payment. Any additional outstanding debts would have to be agreed to be repaid as a former tenant debt. This would also become a specific condition of any new tenancy agreement granted.

The manager assessing the case will consult with the Income Team leader to consider carefully whether to give payment under this scheme for tenants in rent arrears.

If arrears recovery has progressed beyond court order stage, the Neighbourhoods and Enforcement Manager or Income and Home Ownership Manager will consider whether a move can be sanctioned or not.

Tenants requiring assistance with moving

Usually, tenants will be given their payment once they have signed a new tenancy agreement and moved into their new home, by way of bank transfer. They will be able to make their own arrangements and get help from their support network.

In exceptional cases, where the tenant is not able to make their own arrangements, and does not have support available to do so, WHBC may arrange some aspects of their move for them, for instance their removals. We would make direct payments to the contractor for these services, which would usually be deducted from the Rightsizing transfer payment made to the tenant upon moving home.

In exceptional cases of vulnerable tenants, without support and/in financial hardship, WHBC may use other available resources to help the customer with additional services in addition to the standard rates of payment. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Manager or Team leader assessing the request.

Property Condition

Unless there are exceptional circumstances any properties in poor or unsatisfactory condition, particularly because of unauthorised works or improvements, will prevent a move from being authorised and payments being received from this scheme.

However, if a move is sanctioned for a tenant whose property is in poor or unsatisfactory condition, it may be possible to offset the incentive, or part of it, against the cost of the work required.

When the keys to the property have been returned, an inspection of the property will be carried out by the Neighbourhood Officer. Providing the property is in a satisfactory condition, payment would be made after this.

WHBC policies to consider while assisting a customer to downsize are:

Housing Allocations Policy
Decant Policy

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