

DEPARTMENT:	Housing Services
DATE APPROVED BY BOARD:	TBC
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	September 2027
CONSULTATION POST OT & LT REVIEW	N/A
SQUARED IMPACT ASSESSMENT COMPLETED	N/A

1. Purpose and context

1.1 Squared provides homes for people least able to compete in the housing market by granting tenancies that are sustainable, support long-term housing stability, and contribute to settled communities.

Squared recognises that the supply of affordable accommodation is limited. The organisation will therefore ensure that available homes are allocated fairly, transparently and in accordance with assessed housing need, relevant nomination arrangements and this policy.

2. Scope of this policy

2.1 This Policy applies to general needs properties and over 50's accommodation and our leased schemes only. Squared will allocate applicable lettings through the Local Authority Choice Based Lettings Scheme (Bedfordshire Homefinder) in line with any nomination agreement, service level agreement, local lettings plan or direct lettings protocol in place. Squared currently holds a waiting list for over 50's accommodation only. All other general needs properties are allocated through internal transfer, mutual exchange, the Choice Based Lettings system, or any agreed direct letting route.

2.2 **Leased portfolio referral arrangements.** Squared accepts referrals into its leased portfolio from Bridge Housing, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council Housing Options teams. These arrangements support access to good quality, affordable accommodation for customers referred by partner agencies where the property is suitable for the household's assessed needs.

2.3 Rents for Squared's leased properties are set at approximately 80% of the relevant commercial market rent. Affordability assessments are completed by the referring body

before referral, and Squared will rely on those assessments when considering whether the accommodation is suitable and affordable for the customer.

2.4 Squared has historically provided private leased accommodation to Luton Borough Council's Temporary Accommodation Department for customers to whom the Council continued to owe a housing duty. Squared has decided that it will not offer further properties to Luton Borough Council's Temporary Accommodation Department outside the agreed Choice Based Lettings route or Squared's leased scheme.

2.5 Where Squared continues to house existing temporary accommodation customers, those arrangements will be managed until the accommodation becomes vacant. As temporary accommodation placements end and properties become available, suitable stock will migrate across to Squared's leased scheme, subject to property suitability, landlord agreement, operational requirements and any necessary governance approval.

2.6 Where a temporary accommodation tenant is unable to bid through Choice Based Lettings because the relevant local authority has discharged its duty, Squared may consider an application to its leased offer provided supporting evidence of affordability and suitability is provided.

2.7 This policy should be read alongside Squared's nomination arrangements with Luton Borough Council, including the Nomination Protocol, Nomination Request Form, Nomination Return Form, Local Lettings Protocol, Direct Lettings Protocol and Service Level Agreement. These documents set out the process for advertising properties, obtaining nominations, returning nominations, applying approved local lettings criteria, requesting direct lets and resolving disputes.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 This policy applies to all Squared Housing team members.

4. Definitions and legislation referenced in this policy

4.1 Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended

4.2 Localism Act 2011

4.3 Homelessness Act 2002

5. Recommendations for independent contractors

5.1 N/A

6. Main body: how we will meet our obligations

6.1 Squared will allocate properties in accordance with household size and assessed need. One bedroom will normally be allocated for each person or couple living as part of the household, subject to the following exceptions:

- Two children under 16 of the same gender are expected to share
- Two children under 10 are expected to share regardless of gender
- A disabled tenant or partner who needs a non-resident carer overnight will be allowed an extra bedroom
- Approved foster carers will be allowed an additional room so long as they have fostered a child or become an approved foster carer in the last 12 months
- Disabled children who are unable to share a bedroom with a sibling because of their severe disabilities are allowed their own room.
- An adopted child or children are counted for the room allowance once an adoption order is made. If children are placed with the applicant before adoption, the applicant is allowed one room only for them.
- For students away from home, a room is counted providing they are away for less than 52 weeks and intend to return home.

6.2 Applications for our waiting list will be allocated points to decide priority need based on our Points Scheme (Appendix A).

6.3 It is the applicant's responsibility to tell Squared about any change in circumstances while they are on the waiting list so that their application can be assessed and points can be updated accurately.

6.4 For acceptance on to the waiting list, applicants must be:

- Over 55 years of age or between 50 and 55 years of age if there are medical grounds.
- Residents of Luton or Central Bedfordshire.
- Require accommodation in Luton or Central Bedfordshire because of family, work, medical or social need, including harassment or domestic abuse.
- In need of affordable social rented housing. We may refuse an applicant who has savings in excess of £30,000.
- Currently living in temporary accommodation where the Council has withdrawn its duty to rehouse.
- Eligible to remain in the United Kingdom indefinitely, for example because they have indefinite leave to remain.
- Applicants will receive 12 points for each full year they are registered on the waiting list. The waiting list will be reviewed annually, and applicants who do not respond to review contact may be removed from the list.

6.5 All offers of tenancy will be made in writing.

6.6 Offers are made on the condition that the applicant pays a minimum of two weeks' rent in advance in all circumstances. All new tenancies will be signed up to the Rental Exchange in partnership with Experian.

- 6.7 Applicants on our waiting list will be allowed two reasonable offers of housing and if they refuse the final offer of housing, they will be removed from the waiting list. Refusals must be for a valid reason such as the property not meeting medical need or personal safety. If it is decided the reason is invalid, we may remove an applicant from the waiting list immediately.
- 6.8 Applicants nominated via CBL will be expected to give their refusal reason to the Local Authority who will decide whether this is acceptable and whether the applicant can continue to bid.
- 6.9 In exceptional circumstances, Squared may approve an urgent management transfer for a current tenant. Management transfers will normally be limited to situations where there is an immediate and serious risk to the personal safety of the tenant or their household if they remain in their current home, and where an emergency move is the only reasonable solution.
- 6.10 The decision to award a management transfer will be made by the Director of Homes with Support following submission of an application by the Customer Relationship Manager. The application must include all relevant supporting evidence.
- 6.11 Alternative accommodation will be offered on a like for like basis, Management Transfers are not to be used for dealing with other issues such as overcrowding.
- 6.12 Only one offer of accommodation will be made.
- 6.13 **Strategic asset management and planned disposal transfers.** Squared may also approve an internal transfer where this is necessary to support an approved strategic asset management decision, including the planned disposal of a property or group of properties. This may apply where homes are inefficient to manage, no longer provide suitable long-term accommodation, or require significant capital investment that is disproportionate to the benefit achieved by improvement. Any such decision must be supported by a clear business case, appropriate governance approval, an audit trail, and consideration of the impact on affected customers.
- 6.14 Where an internal transfer is required to support planned disposal, Squared will ensure that the tenant is treated fairly, consulted appropriately and offered reasonable support throughout the move. The transfer route must not be used to avoid Squared's obligations under any nomination agreement, local lettings arrangement, direct lettings protocol or service level agreement.
- 6.15 Where the vacated property is to be retained and re-let, it will normally be advertised or allocated through the appropriate agreed route. Where the property is to be disposed of, it will be removed from the lettings process and the reason for withdrawal or exemption will be recorded.
- 6.16 Income generated from the sale of properties will, where appropriate and subject to governance approval, be reinvested through Squared's capital improvement programmes. This reinvestment will support improvements to the quality, safety, energy efficiency and long-term sustainability of existing stock, helping Squared make best use of its homes and better serve customers.

- 6.17 Under-occupation is where a tenant is occupying a property with one or more bedrooms above their needs.
- 6.18 Since the introduction of Universal Credit and the benefit cap, tenants with spare bedrooms may be expected to pay the shortfall between rent and the housing element of their benefits. This can increase the risk of rent arrears, and Squared will work with affected tenants to help reduce financial hardship wherever possible.
- 6.19 To ensure best use of stock and support tenancy sustainability, Squared will refer tenants with at least one spare bedroom to the Downsize Incentive Scheme where appropriate.

7. Compliance and Monitoring

- 7.1 All general needs lettings require completion of a CORE form, which must be submitted through the CORE system by 31 March annually.
- 7.2 Void turnaround performance will be monitored through key performance indicators and reported to the Strategic Team on a monthly basis.

8. Other Relevant Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies, procedures and agreements:

- Tenancy Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Void Management Procedure
- Luton Borough Council Choice Based Lettings Service Level Agreement, Nomination Protocol, Local Lettings Protocol and Direct Lettings Protocol

Appendix A: Points Scheme

Points will be awarded as follows:

<u>Current housing situation</u>	
<u>Living in temporary housing, e.g. hostel, HMO or private sector leased accommodation</u>	75
<u>Under-occupying</u>	
<u>Occupying a property with more bedrooms than required</u>	50
<u>Overcrowding</u>	
The size criteria in the social rented sector allows one bedroom for: Every adult couple, whether married, civil partners or living together as a couple • Any other adult aged 16 or over • Any two children of the same gender aged 10 or over but under 16 • Any two children aged under 10, regardless of gender	10 for each bedroom short

- Any other child (other than a foster child or child whose main home is elsewhere) - An approved foster carer who has fostered a child, or become an approved foster carer, within the last 12 months - A child who cannot share because of a disability or medical condition	
<u>Family needs</u>	
<u>Applicant requires alternative accommodation to escape harassment or violence. Supporting evidence is required.</u>	30
<u>The current property is in disrepair and subject to a Repairs Notice (written proof required)</u>	20
<u>Applicant is experiencing health problems made worse by their current housing. Medical evidence is required.</u>	Up to 30
<u>The applicant has a disability and their current accommodation is unsuitable.</u>	40
<u>Time on list</u>	
<u>For each full month on the waiting list, the applicant will be awarded one point.</u> <u>The waiting list will be reviewed annually.</u>	Up to 12