

## **Downsizing Policy**

### **Aim of the Policy**

#### **What is Downsizing?**

Downsizing is a scheme designed to increase the supply of larger social accommodation by offering incentives to those who are under-occupying by providing them with practical support and financial assistance to move from their existing Council home.

Southampton City Council have a duty to ensure that we are making the best use of our housing stock that is available to our residents.

Within the city there are a limited number of social homes available, and demand for social housing is increasing. Reports have shown that we have a proportion of properties which are under-occupied and under used. With the high demand for larger family homes and the number of families living in overcrowded conditions on the waiting list, we are looking at ways to maximise the use of the housing that we have.

Downsizing is about providing support to existing Southampton City Council tenants in Southampton so that they can access accommodation that is the right size for them. This includes providing support to those who are under occupying social accommodation and assisting them in finding accommodation that is a size suited to their needs.

Helping residents to downsize appropriately will:

- Release larger properties for re-letting to overcrowded families
- Make best use of existing council stock

This may mean moving to a smaller property or assistance with finding a property that has adaptations or is all on one level. It may mean support in accessing age designated accommodation or looking at Housing with Care schemes.

Downsizing can be achieved by looking and exploring the housing options available, whilst ensuring tenants keep the security a social tenancy offers.

This policy sits alongside the Council's Mutual Exchange and Allocations Policies which also facilitate downsizing.

### **Relevant staff**

This policy applies to all Southampton City Council staff required to administer housing allocations functions and housing management functions.

## Who is eligible to Downsize?

- Secure tenants of Southampton City Council

### Who are:

- Giving up one or more bedrooms (moving from a one bedroom to a studio is exempt from this policy)
- The Allocations Policy will allow council tenants moving to smaller accommodation one additional room than they require in line with the bedroom need as stated in the Housing Allocations Policy.
- Have maintained their home in a satisfactory condition subject to a pre vacation inspection,
- Provide vacant possession of the home.
- Be living in general needs accommodation.
- Not be in breach of your tenancy conditions.
- Have no housing related debt with Southampton City Council that exceeds the incentive payment which will be applied to repay any housing related debt. This also includes any rechargeable repairs, where this is over and above the normal wear and tear expected. We also reserve the right to reduce or eliminate any other debts owed to the Council from all or part of the incentive payment. Those in this category can be accepted as eligible under an exception to policy if agreed with the Allocations Manager.
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- Tenants with an Introductory tenancy will need to complete their probationary period before becoming eligible to apply. Non-secure tenants (such as those in temporary accommodation) do not have the right to transfer and so cannot take part in the scheme.
- A downsizing payment will only be available to those moving to particular schemes or taking part in particular projects. This is so we can release the most amount of larger or adapted homes possible. It is not a payment that is available to everyone that is downsizing.
- In the case of joint tenants, the payments will be split between both tenants equally. If payment is requested to be made to one tenant, permission from both tenants will be required before payment can be made. If there is a dispute over tenancy rights this will need to be resolved before being considered for this scheme.

**In making this decision, the council will consider:**

- The applicant's previous management of a tenancy.
- Previous fraudulent housing applications.
- Housing debts owed (by anyone included in the application).
- A history of non-payment of rent.
- A history of arrestable offences committed in the vicinity of the applicants current or previous home.
- Involvement in anti-social behaviour.

Housing Association tenants who are downsizing are not covered under this policy and therefore not eligible for an incentive payment. They should contact their housing provider to see what options are available to them.

## **How to downsize**

All tenants wishing to downsize must make an application to join the housing register.

Applications to join the Housing Register can be made online through the councils website [Join the Housing Register \(southampton.gov.uk\)](https://southampton.gov.uk/join-the-housing-register)

On occasions it may be necessary for a Housing Assessment Officer to visit you at home to complete the application form.

For tenants requesting a move to Housing with Care, for a move on medical grounds, or to a property with adaptations, additional information will be required.

If you require further advice or guidance on making an application please contact [Housing.Allocations@southampton.gov](mailto:Housing.Allocations@southampton.gov) or call 02380 833006. You can also visit Gateway in the Civic Centre for further advice.

## **Policy**

In carrying out this policy we will:

- follow best practice,

- treat all tenants in a fair and non-discriminatory way, as set out in our Equality and Diversity Policy,
- treat all information provided as confidential,
- not require under-occupying tenants to downsize unless they agree.

## Incentives

Once a tenant agrees to downsize, they will be placed on the Housing Waiting List and awarded a high priority banding. Once a suitable property is found, the tenant will effectively serve notice to terminate their existing tenancy and be granted another tenancy on the same basis at the new property. The property will be offered in accordance with the Council's Allocations Policy and will be suitable for the tenant's housing needs.

An incentive is a one-off financial payment made after the tenant has downsized.

Tenants can claim the incentive payment within 3 months of moving home and it will be paid after 28 days of the start of any new social tenancy. This timescale is subject to having all the necessary information available.

<b>Incentive for the first bedroom</b>	£1000.00
<b>For every additional bedroom</b>	£500.00
<b>Removals</b>	£750.00

A tenant moving from a two bedroom or larger property and giving up at least one bedroom will be able to claim a one-off incentive payment of £1000.

Any claim for removal costs will require a receipt.

Depending on circumstances, for those moving from general needs accommodation into age designated or housing with care accommodation, a tenant may receive support with the following:

- Organising a removal van.
- Cost of removals.
- Assistance in updating benefits.
- Organising connection of cooker and/or washing machine.

A Housing Officer will discuss with the tenant if support is needed and what can be provided. Alternative contact numbers or methods of communication can be established if required.

For tenants that require additional support, or who may be considered or consider themselves to be vulnerable, Council Officers will assess circumstances on a case-by-case basis and provide appropriate support as needed to facilitate the move.

If there are any housing related debts such as rent arrears, repair charges or court costs, these will be deducted from the incentive payment. We also reserve the right to reduce or eliminate any other debts owed to the Council from all or part of the incentive payment.

To qualify for an incentive payment the tenant must submit a claim form within 3 months after they have vacated the property. Any claims received after this time may not be paid and will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

The scheme is subject to a budget limit. Payments are offered on a 'first come, first served' basis and if there are more requests for transfer incentive payments than there is funding available, no more payments will be made, and the scheme will be suspended until the start of the next financial year.

### **Mutual Exchange**

Social tenants are also able to downsize by mutual exchange through the HomeSwapper website. This is a free service to existing social tenants, both council and tenants of registered providers.

This service can be access online - [HomeSwapper](#)

Tenants who downsize through the option of mutual exchange will not be eligible for an incentive payment under this policy and are subject to the mutual exchange policy and procedure.

### **GDPR**

All personal information relating to tenants will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the 2018 Data Protection Act, the European Union General Data Protection Regulations and the Council's Privacy policy.

Tenants also sign a privacy statement when taking on a tenancy and data recorded as part of this policy will be held and used in line with their tenancy agreement.

### **Consultation and Communication**

Consultation and communication will take place with tenants and other affected parties in line with our Tenant Engagement Strategy.

## Version Control

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