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## Downsizing Grant Policy

Directorate: Customer Services  
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## 1. Introduction

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 changed the criteria for under occupancy. Since April 2013, social housing tenants of working age who are deemed to be under occupying their home have had their housing benefit payment reduced by either 14% for under occupation by one bedroom or by 25% for under occupation by two or more bedrooms (otherwise known as the 'bedroom tax').

To address these changes, Salix Homes has allocated a budget to support those unable to downsize due to the costs of moving.

## 2. Aim / Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to support tenants experiencing significant financial hardship due to the 'bedroom tax', by offering financial assistance to assist with removals or associated costs. Priority will be given to tenants who otherwise would not have been able to afford to move.

## 3. Policy

### 1. Budget

1.1 Salix Homes has allocated a budget to be administered in accordance with the eligibility criteria. Priority will be awarded according to need rather than application date.

### 2. Financial Offer

2.1 If approved, eligible applicants will either:

- Have their full removal costs arranged and paid for by a Salix Homes approved company *or*
- Receive a £250 one off cash payment to arrange and fund their own removal costs

2.2 If the applicant organises their own removal arrangements, Salix Homes will send a cheque or BACS transfer £250, usually within 10 working days of signing the new tenancy agreement.

### 3. Eligibility Criteria

3.1 Downsizing Fund Applications must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Applicants must be a tenant of Salix Homes, not within their starter period and willing to downsize to another property managed by Salix Homes regardless of property type;
- Applicants must be currently accommodated in a property of 2 or more bedrooms;
- Applicants must be currently under occupying their property by at least 1 bedroom;
- Applicants must be of working age and in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit;

- Applicants must be registered on Salford Home Search with an active account;
- Applicants must not have caused anti-social behaviour which has resulted in legal action within the previous 12 months or have any legal action pending;
- Multiple applications from the same household will not be considered;
- All members of the household must be moving out of the property;
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate financial hardship which prevents them from downsizing due to the cost of removals.

3.2 Applicants with rent arrears and/or a court order *may* be offered financial assistance with removals if they can demonstrate:

- A willingness to pay and engage with Salix Homes' Income Management Team *and*
- That significant financial hardship is perpetuated by the reduction in housing benefit/Universal Credit due to under occupancy. An affordability assessment will be carried out to establish hardship.

If approved, tenants will sign an arrears arrangement as part of their new tenancy agreement to pay off any outstanding rent arrears and court costs. Liability for unpaid recharges will also remain.

In relation to the eligibility criteria, each case will be considered on its own merit.

## 4. Service Standards & Performance Measures

- Number of households benefitting from the downsizing grant.
- % of downsizing moves helped by the fund as a total of all households downsizing due to the 'bedroom tax'

## 5. Risks

**Risk 1** Officers do not use the grant appropriately

**Responsible** Income Manager

**Mitigation** All existing and new employees working with tenants affected by the 'bedroom tax' will be made aware of the fund through regular awareness sessions.

**Risk 2** The scheme fails to deliver on its aims

**Responsible for risk** Income Manager

**Mitigation** Use of the fund will be reviewed regularly to assess its achievements against its aim. Remedial action will be taken to address any issues (e.g. better promotion of the budget, re-assessing criteria). A report will be produced at the end of the year to assess and demonstrate tangible outcomes.

## 6. Related Procedures & Documents

- Downsizing application form
- Salford City Council's Allocations policy
- Empty Property Management policy and procedure
- Choice Based Lettings policy and procedure

- Lodgers and Subletting policy and procedure
- Mutual Exchange policy and procedure

## 7. Responsibilities

Identifying applicants – all front line officers  
Internal promotion of fund – Income Management team  
Assessing and approving applications – Income Supervisors/Income Manager  
Identifying suitable property – Neighbourhood Managers, Neighbourhood Officers  
Co-ordinating removals – Neighbourhood Team, Income Management team  
Allocating fund – Income Supervisors/Income Manager

## 8. Related Legislation

Salix Homes is required to comply with statutory requirements and rules and guidance issued by the Government and her departments. The following is a non-exhaustive list of legislation relevant to this policy:

Housing Acts 1985, 1988 and 1996  
Welfare Reform Act 2012  
Draft Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2012  
Criminal Law Act 1977  
Family law Act 1996  
Equality Act 2010  
Family Law Act 1996  
Civil Partnership Act 2004  
Matrimonial Causes Act 1973  
Children Act 1989  
Homes and Communities Agency regulatory standards

Any personal information provided to us regarding customers' personal or financial circumstances will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. All data held in respect of residents will be recorded and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (as amended by statutory instrument 2002 No. 2905).