



Downsizing Incentive Policy



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Lincoln's ambitious future



1. Introduction

City of Lincoln Council has a duty to ensure that it makes the most effective use of its housing stock.

Within the City of Lincoln there are Council properties which are under-occupied by tenants. These homes would previously have been signed for to meet the needs of a family, however over time the family composition has changed reducing the number of people living in the home. Under occupation is usually defined in terms of excess bedrooms within a property, this can arise for many reasons.

This downsizing policy is intended to ensure that properties are being used to their full capacity and to assist the City of Lincoln Council in managing under occupancy alongside the Allocations Policy.

This policy will set out City of Lincoln Council's approach to enable tenants to move to properties which are smaller and meet their housing need.

This policy will detail the incentives and support the City of Lincoln Council can offer to tenants who are under occupying to support them to downsize to smaller properties. This scheme is open to all secure tenants within the local authority boundary, but priority within the scheme will be given to those affected by the spare room subsidy, more commonly known as bedroom tax.

How will the Downsizing Policy deliver:

- We will work closely with all relevant local authority departments to help support a move where possible.
- We will offer both financial and practical support which can take a variety of forms i.e., help with connecting utilities and a handyperson service to tenants to make it easier for them to move.
- We may make direct offers of accommodation to assist tenants needing to downsize.
- Tenants and Council staff have clear and accessible information on:
 - ◆ Downsizing property incentives, support, and assistance.
 - ◆ The payments and support available to tenants that downsize.
 - ◆ What deductions will be taken from payments.
 - ◆ Reviews and appeals.

2. Eligibility for the scheme

These are the circumstances that we will consider someone joining the scheme:

- Have one or more bedrooms not occupied.
- Currently a secure tenant.
- Vacant possession on tenancy concluding I.e., no other household members will remain in the property or be made homeless as a result.
- Access to be granted to the Council to complete a property inspection within 4 weeks of the move to ensure that the property meets our void standards.

There may be circumstances when a tenant would not qualify as follows:

- If a tenant lives in an adapted property and a member of the household still needs the specialist facilities.
- If there is no funding available.
- Applicants can be refused onto the scheme, if there are serious breaches of tenancy, such as but not limited to; Criminality, ASB or outstanding possession action.
- The panel will assess each case on its own merit before deciding whether to accept or reject the application based on the evidence presented.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Incentives

If a tenant qualifies for the scheme, they will receive a basic payment of £2000. We will then pay in addition to the first payment a further £500 for each bedroom that a tenant gives up. The below are examples of circumstances:

- where tenants are affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy, creating a shortfall in benefit payments which has led to rent arrears.
- where tenants are occupying family homes which are no longer needed to accommodate the household.
- where tenants are living in homes with adaptations for a disabled person, and these are no longer needed, for example, homes with a through-floor lift or disabled adapted kitchens.
- where tenants are under-occupying a property because they have discretionary succession rights to a tenancy.
- where tenants wish to downsize, and their household composition allows them to do so.

Incentive payments will not be considered where:

- the tenant(s) are occupying a property on insecure terms e.g., a licence agreement, temporary accommodation, non-secure tenancy agreement or where payments have been accepted for use and occupation only.

- the tenant has been served with a NOSP or is subject to possession for serious breaches of tenancy such as Criminality or ASB. The panel will assess each case on its own merit before deciding whether pay the incentive payment.

3.2 Disruption payments

In addition to the incentive payments, we will pay a disruption payment of £800 for those who qualify for the scheme. This payment will cover costs such as removal costs, reconnecting and disconnecting utilities, refitting flooring.

3.3 Support with moving

We acknowledge that moving can be a stressful and often challenging time for tenants.

If assistance is needed for a tenant to move to another property, we will help with:

- arranging removals
- arranging disconnection and reconnection of services
- refitting carpets
- decorating

The cost of carrying out any or all the above would be taken from the lump sum and the balance paid to the tenants.

3.4 Handy Person

In addition to offering incentive payments, City of Lincoln Council will offer a handyperson service to help with jobs such as tiling, putting up shelves and hanging blinds at the property moved in to, equivalent to no more than three hours work. If the tenant needs the service longer than these three hours, agreement will be needed. This may incur costs that will need to be deducted from the lump sum payment or paid on invoice for extra costs incurred.

3.5 Advice and Assistance

City of Lincoln City Council will provide advice and assistance on housing options, to tenants who are under-occupying, especially to those who are potentially affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy. Tenants identified as under-occupying their homes may be contacted periodically to inform them of housing options and incentives as these become available. This could include:

- advice on mutual exchange.
- advice about the availability of smaller properties through the Local Authority.
- money advice and debt management.
- tenancy sustainment support.

3.6 Best use of stock

Applications to this scheme will be prioritised in line with the provisions of the Allocations Policy; This may include moving from a house to a flat, or if suitable, into retirement or supported accommodation.

In circumstances where a tenant is under-occupying an adapted property, which has been funded through a disabled facility grant, City of Lincoln Council will look to find a smaller property which has already been adapted, fully or partially, to meet the household's needs. If this is not possible then we would look to adapt the property downsized to in conjunction with a report from an occupational therapist to meet the household's needs prior to occupation.

3.7 Mutual Exchanges

Applications to this scheme can be considered for mutual exchanges where the exchanging household is under-occupying and the household member numbers meet the required allocation for each property and are registered on Lincs Homefinder awaiting housing of the type being exchanged. Further details of criteria for the mutual exchange process are available in the mutual exchange policy.

3.8 Incentive payment

Payment will only be paid once the tenant has signed for the new tenancy and ended their former tenancy.

3.9 Deductions from payments

Where there are outstanding debts owed to City of Lincoln Council, these will be deducted at source from any payment. Examples of debts include:

- Rent arrears on current tenancy
- Former rent arrears
- Repairs which are the tenant's responsibility
- Damage to current property other than fair wear
- Removing/making good alterations made by the tenant which do not follow property standards
- Any court costs

4. Decision making & appeal process

The original decision and any appeals will consider the tenant's history and current housing situation, bearing in mind that any payments or acceptance onto the scheme are at the discretion of City of Lincoln Council.

Each application will be considered on a case by case basis. Should there be any variations to the financial incentive amounts specified within this policy, this will form part of joined up decision making and appeals process.

The decision to accept a tenant onto the scheme and any variations to the offer will be made by the Area Housing Manager and Housing Solutions Team Leader.

If a tenant is turned down for the scheme, an appeal can be made in writing to the Tenancy Services Manager who will review the application with the Assistant Director of Housing. A written response with the appeal decisions will be made within 20 working days.

If the appeal is not upheld, you have a right to appeal to the Housing Members appeals panel. Any decision made by the member housing appeal panel will be final and concludes the appeals process with no further opportunity to escalate further.

This policy is an incentive scheme and not a core function of housing service delivery. Therefore, the process and its terms sit separately to the formal complaints process and a complaint cannot be submitted if the tenant is unhappy with the decision made once the appeals process has been concluded.

5. Relevant Legislation, Regulation or Standards

This policy will follow all statutory, regulatory, and legal requirements, including but not limited to:

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

6. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Downsizing Scheme

A cost benefit analysis will be undertaken periodically to review and measure the scheme is delivering against the following outcomes:

- Number of known under occupiers reduce because of the scheme
- Larger properties are freed up because of this scheme
- Any reduction in temporary accommodation costs linked to this scheme and relets
- An improved flow of housing voids becoming from letting of the larger property
- Any reduction in City of Lincoln Council Tenants in receipt of long term DHP (Discretionary Housing Payments) for under occupation of the same size properties

7. Related documents

- Allocations Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Rent Arrears Policy
- Tenancy Policy
- Aids and Adaptions Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy

8. Information Sharing and GDPR

City of Lincoln Council respects individuals' rights to privacy and will adhere to all relevant legal principles in relation to information sharing and document management. City of Lincoln Council will not disclose details of applicants to this scheme unless required to do so by law.

Should support be required for completing application or referrals into services as part of the relocation and downsizing process, the City of Lincoln Tenancy Services Team will ensure data sharing permissions have been obtained and documented.

Our privacy statement sets out how we use your information and can be found at www.lincoln.gov.uk/privacy-notices/privacy-notices-services