

## Stafford and Rural Homes Lettings Policy

### About us

Stafford & Rural Homes – SARH – are the largest provider of affordable housing in Stafford and the surrounding rural communities, owning and managing over 6000 homes.

SARH offer a wide range of services including homes for rent or shared ownership, personal safety alarms, and support to live independently in your own home. Information about SARH and the services we provide can be found on our website at [www.sarh.co.uk](http://www.sarh.co.uk).

SARH are a housing association and also a charity, and the vision is to

**“Create great places to live, work and grow”**

As a registered provider of social housing, SARH is regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency (the HCA) and has the highest possible ratings for managing the organisation its finances.

### SARH Lettings Policy

The SARH Lettings Policy is consistent with the HCA’s Tenancy Standard, which requires that registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way taking into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants.

The SARH Lettings Policy sets out how SARH will allocate empty homes in a way that:

- ✓ offers choice
- ✓ meets people’s needs
- ✓ makes the best use of SARH housing stock
- ✓ promotes the development of sustainable and balanced communities.

### Are you eligible for a SARH home?

SARH provide a range of homes for rent and shared ownership.

#### Renting a SARH Home

Anyone who is a UK resident can apply for a SARH rented home.



The Housing Act 1996 sets out details of customers who may not be eligible to apply for a SARH rented home. This includes customers who are subject to immigration control, those who are not classed as “habitually resident”, and those who have limited rights to reside in the UK.

As a registered provider SARH must conduct Right to Rent document checks for all adults moving into a SARH home.

Customers aged 16 or 17 may apply for a SARH home, but cannot hold a legal tenancy until the age of 18. In these circumstances an adult family member or support agency would need to hold the legal tenancy on the young person’s behalf, and the young person would be granted an equitable tenancy until they reach the age of 18.

SARH will only let homes to SARH employees, Board Members, and their relatives in line with the highest standards of probity and governance. Customers will be asked to disclose this when they apply for a SARH Home and any allocation of a home will need to be approved by a member of the SARH Leadership Team.

More detailed information on eligibility can be found in the Guide to Accessing Affordable Homes for Rent and Shared Ownership and on the SARH website – [www.sarh.co.uk](http://www.sarh.co.uk)

### Specialist Housing

SARH provides homes for older and vulnerable customers which are designed to enable customers to live independently in their homes. The majority of these homes will be let using the SARH Lettings Service, although some homes may have specific criteria attached to them to ensure they are let to individuals with a defined need for that type of home.

Within its specialist housing stock SARH provides a number of units of Extracare Housing, designed for customers with care needs. A full assessment will be undertaken for customers applying for extracare housing to establish their individual needs and the support they require. These assessments are usually carried out jointly with a care professional, and are discussed at a dedicated Extracare Housing Panel to ensure SARH is able to offer the most suitable home to meet these needs.

### **SARH Lettings criteria**

SARH homes are designed to meet differing customer needs and some may have certain restrictions placed upon who can apply for them, known as home criteria. These criteria are set to ensure SARH make best use of its homes and take into account the property type and size. These criteria include nomination rights, local lettings policies, criteria relating to rural



properties, and requirements that customers have a connection to the area in which the home is located.

In the event that there are no applications for a SARH home from customers who meet the home criteria, other customers may be considered depending upon need and affordability.

SARH homes will be advertised and any such criteria will be clearly defined.

More detailed information on home criteria can be found in the Guide to Accessing Affordable Homes for Rent and Shared Ownership and on the SARH website – [www.sarh.co.uk](http://www.sarh.co.uk)

SARH has committed to offer up to 75% of its homes to Stafford Borough Council (SBC) who will nominate a customer in line with SBC's needs based Housing Allocations Scheme. If a home is not let following a nomination from SBC it will be let using the SARH Lettings Service.

The SARH Lettings Service includes limited circumstances in which existing SARH customers will be given a priority to transfer to a different SARH home to comply with SARH Charitable aims and the HCA's tenancy standards.

Information shared by the customer when they register with the SARH lettings Service will be used to determine whether the customer has any of the following needs:

- Customers who need to move because they are living in under-occupied or overcrowded conditions
- Customers who have medical needs which are preventing them from returning home from hospital or from being able to use essential facilities within their home
- Customers who are experiencing or are at risk of domestic abuse, harassment or serious harm

Where two customers apply for a home with the same priority, the home will be allocated to the customer with the earliest registration date.

On some occasions SARH may let a home directly to a customer without advertising the property. These will be classed as Direct Lets and will be used in cases where an urgent need is identified that does not fall within one of the priority groups set out above.

Customers registered on the SARH Lettings Service will have their application reviewed periodically. If they have not applied for a SARH home during the twelve month period their



registration will be closed. Should they wish to apply for SARH homes they will need to re-register, and their registration date will change accordingly.

### **Reasons why you may not be able to apply for a SARH home**

There are a number of reasons why a customer who is eligible for a SARH home may need to have their circumstances reviewed and approved before they are able to apply for a SARH home. These reasons are outlined below, and more detailed information can be found in the Guide to Accessing Affordable Homes for Rent and Shared Ownership and in the Frequently Asked Questions section on the website – [www.sarh.co.uk](http://www.sarh.co.uk)

- Where there is evidence that the customer, or a member of their household, is guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour, including violent behaviour, serious noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, or using a home for illegal purposes.
- Where a customer owes rent or other debts to a current or previous landlord, and has not entered into and maintained an agreed repayment plan. The amount and cause of the arrears, and any actions taken to reduce them will be taken into consideration.
- Where a current SARH customer wishes to move to another SARH home but has breached the conditions of tenancy in their current home.
- Where a current SARH customer wishes to move to another SARH home within one years of their tenancy starting.
- Where the customer's household has an income in excess of £60,000 per annum and/or savings in excess of £30,000.
- Where a customer owns a property.
- Where a customer has the Right to Rent in accordance with the Immigration Act, but is not entitled to claim welfare benefits, tax credits or housing assistance, and is not in permanent employment.
- Where a customer has a history of criminal offences which may affect where they can be housed.
- Where a customer has given false or fraudulent information in their application.

For each of the circumstances above SARH may request further information, and may conduct a home visit to discuss further with the customer.

SARH may exclude customers from the Lettings Scheme for the reasons set out above.

If a customer is to be excluded from registration they will be notified in writing of the reasons why and if applicable what action/s they should take to have the decision changed.



## **Appealing against a SARH decision**

Customers have the right to appeal against a range of decisions made during the SARH Lettings process. These are:

- A decision to exclude a customer from applying for homes
- A decision to close an application
- A decision about Priority banding
- Any decision about the facts of their application, which is likely to be, or has been taken into account in considering whether to allocate a home.

Appeals can be made in a number of ways including verbally, via e-mail and letter, and must give details as to why the customer wants the appeal and provide any other information to be considered.

Appeals will be considered by a member of staff who is senior to the person who made the original decision, and who was not involved in the original decision. They will either decide to overturn or support the original decision.

The customer will be informed of the decision within 10 working days of the appeal being received.

