



**Home Release Scheme
(Downsizing Incentive) Policy**

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1.0 Scope

The “Home Release Scheme” downsizing incentive policy sets out the approach that Broxtowe Borough Council takes to residents who wish to move to a smaller home.

The policy applies to any Council tenant that meets the eligibility criteria within the Policy.

The policy only applies to those moving between Council properties, so does not apply to those residents that may be moving from another social housing provider to a Council property, and may be downsizing as a result.

It also does not apply to those tenants that are downsizing through mutual exchange or succession.

Payments are only made to the tenant or joint tenants, so others within the household will not receive it. Only one payment is made per claim.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to outline the criteria and execution of the Council’s downsizing incentive scheme.

The Council has a shortage of family homes as its stock of these has reduced over time due to the Right to Buy scheme. The demand for these properties is high due to the limited supply of affordable homes and affordability issues within the private rented sector. Many families also appreciate the security of tenure offered by Council tenancies.

The Council therefore has a steady supply of smaller property, 1 and 2 bedroom flats in particular, but fewer larger homes. The aim of the scheme is to offer financial incentives to those tenants who may not be fully occupying their current property, because of changing circumstances since they moved in. It is also to support tenants in the downsizing process as the Council understands that this can be a daunting process and those tenants in occupation could be suffering financial hardship.

3.0 Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the policy are

- To outline the rationale for the scheme
- To outline the criteria and eligibility for the scheme
- To outline how and what deductions may be made
- To outline how payments will be made to tenants
- To outline the support that will be provided to applicants

4.0 Regulatory Code and Legal Framework

Housing Act 1985

Housing Act 1996

5.0 Policy Outline

5.1 Who is eligible for the scheme

The scheme applies to any secure tenant of the Council who is wishing to move and downsize.

To be eligible, the tenant must live in a 2-bedroom property or larger and be downsizing to a 1-bedroom property. The only potential exception is if a tenant is releasing a property with major adaptations and no longer requires an adapted property. Major adaptations are defined within the Aids and Adaptations Policy.

If a property is in a poor state of repair through tenant neglect, this will be referred to the Housing Operations Manager to decide on whether the grant should be paid or the move be prevented in accordance with the Council's Transfer Procedure and Allocations Policy and whether further action is required to either consider tenancy enforcement action or to suspend or exclude the applicant from the waiting list.

Any allocations and suitability of accommodation offered will be subject to the Council's Allocations Policy and duties in accordance with Housing Act 1996 Part 6.

Eligible tenants will be identified by the Lettings Team and will have been awarded the relevant priority Band on the Homeseach scheme, in accordance with the Allocations Policy, that relates to downsizing of property.

5.2 Grant amounts and criteria

The main basic grant that all eligible tenants can receive is £1000. Additional amounts are payable in certain circumstances. These are outlined below.

£500 additional bedroom bonus

For every room underutilised within the property, this is paid. For example, for a single person moving from a 3 bedroom house to a 1 bedroom flat, it would be an additional £1000 on top of the £1000 basic grant. So £2000 paid.

£500 high demand bonus

Some properties within the Broxtowe Borough are in higher demand than others. When a property that is in high demand is eligible for the scheme, an additional £500 is paid on top of the £1000 basic and any other bonus' up to the maximum amount. Demand level is identified and informed by the Housing Operations Manager, who provides management and oversight of the Waiting List.

£500 Independent Living Scheme Bonus

Some properties within the Broxtowe Borough are in low demand, all of these are within Independent Living Schemes. A tenant that accepts a property on a Category 2 scheme will receive this additional bonus on top of the £1000 basic grant and in addition to any other bonus up to the maximum amount set out in the Policy.

£1500 Adapted Property Bonus

In the eventuality that a tenant no longer requires major adaptations that are within the home, because their household circumstances have changed and is wishing to downsize, the Council will pay the additional grant to the tenants in these circumstances. This is in addition to the £1000 basic grant.

There are high costs associated with adapting family homes and the impact that completing major adaptations has on their lettable. Major adaptations are outlined within the Aids and Adaptations Policy.

The amount of grant paid is capped at £2500, regardless of the number of the above bonus criteria that are met.

5.3 Deductions to grants paid

If a tenant has unpaid debts or recharges to the Council, these will be deducted from any grant that is to be paid.

The only charges that are eligible and Housing related charges, such as unpaid rent or charges that have been made due to damage or neglect of the property in the past.

If the level of charges owed exceed the grant amount, the case will be referred to the Housing Operations Manager for a decision on whether the transfer should proceed or not. It may be decided that the transfer should continue, but the Council reduce the debt owed by the quantity of the grant.

5.4 Support Provided for Residents

The Council will provide some additional support to residents who require it. The Council understands that residents may have lived in their homes for many years and therefore it could be a daunting process for them to move.

Help that the Council can provide could include but is not limited to

- Advice and assistance on removals
- Disposal of large or bulky items
- Redirection of mail and changes to benefits and other key services
- Advice regarding utilities and other bills
- Safe disconnection and reconnection of cookers and washing machines

The Home Release Scheme procedure outlines support provided further.

The Council reserves the right to charge for certain services requested by tenants and these will be deducted from the grants paid. These will be made clear to tenants before they are completed and how it will affect the overall grant that is paid.

5.5 Payments

Payments are made through BACS transfer to tenants or paid directly to rent accounts where necessary to clear rent arrears.

Tenants will be notified in writing of the final amounts paid and any deductions made, the amount and the reasons why the deductions have been made.

Tenants can appeal if they do not agree with amounts paid or deductions made. This will be done in writing to the Head of Housing. Appeal processes are outlined in the Home Release Scheme procedure.

6.0 Related Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

This policy should be read in conjunction with the:

- Allocations Policy
- Tenancy Agreement
- Aids and Adaptations Policy

7.0 Review

This Policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless there are significant changes in legislation.

8.0 Document History and Approval

Date	Version	Committee Name
1/11/2022	1.0	Cabinet