



Tenant Incentive Scheme policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Medway Council Landlord Services is committed to adopting every possible means to meet the housing needs of applicants for housing in the area. There is an especially high demand for family sized accommodation, of which Medway Council has a limited supply.
- 1.2 Under occupation of properties is a major concern not just to Medway Council but also to other Social Landlords. This policy provides an incentive for tenants to transfer to a council, social landlord or private sector property more suitable for their household size. This policy will also be applied to offer alternative accommodation to those tenants living in a disabled adapted property that they no longer require.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of the Tenants Incentive Scheme is to:
 - 2.1.1 Encourage and assist tenants under occupying general needs family accommodation to move to smaller accommodation that is suitable for their needs.
 - 2.1.2 Release general needs accommodation of 2 bedrooms or more, in order to maximise occupancy.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all Medway Council Landlord Services tenants that meet the eligibility criteria. This policy is applicable to Medway Council tenants that are downsizing to either
 - a Medway Council managed property
 - another Social Landlord
 - a privately rented property.

4. Legislation and Guidance

4.1 Internal

- Medway Councils' Allocation policy 2012.

5. The Policy

5.1 The allocation and letting of properties will be done in accordance with Medway Councils' Allocation policy and other relevant local lettings plans.

5.2 The tenant incentive scheme will be offered to tenants who make a formal request to the Landlord Services department to take part in the scheme and meet the eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 5.4. In some circumstances the Housing Manager may use their discretion to offer the scheme to a tenant who has not requested it, but they know would be eligible for the scheme.

5.3 Any Council tenant who joins the Housing Register to downsize, whose rent accounts are in arrears only due to the Welfare Reform (size criteria) changes, will have their application left live. Any arrears will be deducted from the incentive scheme payments made at the point of the move.

5.4 Eligibility

5.4.1 The Tenants Incentive Scheme is available to those tenants who meet the following criteria:

- Are a secure or flexible tenant of Medway Council
- Occupy a property with two or more bedrooms
- Whose existing property is in good decorative order (pre-inspection will be carried out prior to acceptance, and once the property has been vacated). Some discretion will be used in determining eligibility against this criterion as individual tenants circumstances will have to be taken into account.
- Can give vacant possession of their present home.
- Have a clear rent account or have an agreement in place to clear arrears (any arrears will be cleared from money due under the Tenants Incentive Scheme) or
- Are a Medway Council tenant who joined the Housing Register to downsize, whose rent accounts are in arrears only due to the Welfare Reform (size criteria) changes.

5.5 Ineligibility

5.5.1 The Tenants Incentive Scheme will not be available to tenants:

- Against whom the Council has commenced legal proceedings for breach of tenancy conditions
- Who hold an introductory tenancy
- Who are licensees
- Who owe current rent arrears and former tenant debts or a sundry debt to the council, that are not a result of Welfare Reform (size criteria) changes and where reasonable repayment of the debt cannot be negotiated.

5.6 Incentive Payment

5.6.1 A 'stepped' fixed incentive payment will be paid at the following rates to those tenants that meet the eligibility criteria:

- A payment of £500 for each bedroom released.
- An additional maximum £500 to help towards moving costs.

5.7 Mutual Exchange

5.7.1 Where a tenant is downsizing via a mutual exchange (moving from a property they are under occupying by bedroom size) and they are affected by the under occupation size criteria charge as a result of Welfare Reform changes, Landlord Services will use its discretion in meeting the costs of removals and any other moving expenses, up to a maximum allowance of £500 per household.

5.7.2 Tenants moving via a mutual exchange that are subject to the under occupation size criteria charge will also be entitled to a downsizing incentive payment. The rates are the same as apply to downsizing transfer applicants see **5.8**. To be eligible for this incentive, the exchange must be to a property where no size criteria charge applies at the time of the move.

5.8 The table below shows how the payment rules work.

Property currently occupied	Property moving to	Bedrooms released	Payment for the released bedroom(s)	Plus a maximum of £500 to help with moving costs	Total payment
2 bed	1 bed	1	£500	£500	£1,000
3 bed	1 bed	2	£1,000	£500	£1,500
4 bed	1 bed	3	£1,500	£500	£2,000

5.8.1 The above payments will be made subject to the budget being available, and the budgetary requirement will be reviewed each year.

5.8.2 If there are more requests for incentive grants than there is funding available, priority to those tenants moving from accommodation that is more urgently required and will be given at the discretion of the Head of Housing Management.

5.9 Aspects covered by the Tenants Incentive Scheme

- 5.9.1 The Tenants Incentive payment is a fixed amount to assist with the reasonable costs of moving home, that includes; removals, connection and disconnection of services replacement carpets and curtains and decoration etc.
- 5.9.2 Landlord Services has a preferred contractor it asks residents to use for removals.
- 5.9.3 Tenants will be expected to submit invoices or receipts to receive the moving cost element of this payment, up to a maximum of £500. Payments will be authorised once the tenant has moved and following an inspection of the vacated property, to ensure that it is left in good decorative and clean order.
- 5.9.4 The Council reserves the right to reduce the payments set out in paragraph **5.8** if:
- There are rent arrears or any other debts owed to the council at the time of offer of transfer.
 - There are any rechargeable costs of any works that the council has to undertake to the vacated premises as a result of damage or neglect on the part of the tenant.

5.10 Financial Resources

- 5.10.1 The budget will be reviewed annually and will be dealt with as part of the annual budget setting process.

5.11 Exceptions

- 5.11.1 Where a dwelling of a particular type is urgently required, the Head of Housing Management may offer the Tenants Incentive Scheme in relation to accommodation other than that described in paragraph 5.4.1 above.

6. Role, Responsibilities and Authority

- 6.1 The Assistant Director of Physical and Cultural Regeneration retains the overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.
- 6.2 The Housing Manager is responsible for the operational delivery of this policy and the associated procedures. This includes responsibility for monitoring and reviewing, staff awareness and training, policy development and communication to tenants.

7. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

- 7.1 The Tenancy Service Manager will monitor applications made for mutual exchange from the stage when the application is received through to the completion or refusal.
- 7.2 This policy will be reviewed every two years, unless changes to Government legislation or internal policy affecting this policy require it to be reviewed at an earlier date.

Policy Version Control Sheet

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Policy Author(s): Policy and Partnership officer

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Cross References: Tenancy Management Policy, Repairs Policy, Compensation Policy

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