



How to...

*Improve housing mobility*



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# Why is housing mobility important?

Improving mobility in the housing sector is important for a number of reasons:

**1 Making best use of stock:** The combination of constricted new supply in the affordable housing sector with falling lettings limits the ability of housing providers to respond to changing housing needs.

According to figures published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), there are currently 1.75 million households on social housing waiting lists in England; yet only 39,170 new affordable homes were provided for social rent in 2010-11. General needs social lettings made by local authorities and housing associations fell from 371,000 in 1998 to 252,609 in 2009/10.

Fewer households are leaving the social sector, thus freeing up new social homes. Improved mobility for existing tenants could help housing providers make better use of their stock (such as by reducing under-occupation), improve satisfaction and quality of life, and give existing tenants a greater sense of fairness.

**Meeting tenants' aspirations:** The 2009 report [Mobility matters](#) identified a level of demand for mobility in social housing from tenants that is not being met. 37 per cent of residents surveyed out of 1,280 said that they wanted to move.

In addition, looking at the mobility needs of older people housed by an ALMO in the North West, the NHF mobility taskforce found 50 per cent of the sample wanted to move due to reasons of health or disability. 24 per cent wanted a smaller home and 18 per cent found their current home too expensive to maintain. 60 per cent of older people surveyed wanted to move within the same neighbourhood, the main factors influencing their choice of area being proximity to shops, friends, family and services such as healthcare.

**Employment and training:** By the end of 2011, unemployment had risen to 2.62 million. Greater mobility in the housing sector could lead to greater opportunities for tenants and support local economies by improving tenants' access to training and work. There is evidence that poor mobility in the housing sector has negative impacts on the uptake of employment and training.

**Wider social and economic benefits:** The 2010 report by the Human City Institute, [Counting costs](#), estimated that the annual cost of poor mobility in the housing sector to wider society and the economy is £542 million. This includes costs associated with tenants not being able to move to care for relatives, costs to the NHS associated with the physical and health consequences of inappropriate housing, and anti-social behaviour costs associated with overcrowding.

## What are the barriers to mobility for landlords?

The recent National Housing Federation mobility taskforce identified the following barriers to landlords to supporting moves:

- inadequate sub-regional choice based lettings schemes
- lack of adapted properties for people with disabilities
- costs of facilitating moves, for example through creating chains of moves
- lack of supply of options that would attract under-occupiers, compounded in some cases by allocation schemes that insist people can only move into a property where the bed spaces match the household.

# What are the barriers to housing mobility for tenants?

There are many different social and economic reasons why mobility in the social housing sector is limited. These include:

**Maintaining social and family networks:** A recent study, based on in-depth interviews with residents of a large former council estate in Sheffield suggests that people are unwilling to cut family ties and close social networks and hence move for what are most likely low-paid and insecure jobs. This might explain why the majority of moves (90 per cent) within the social sector are within a 10 miles radius.

**Limitations associated with web-based home-swap services:** Whilst the internet offers an excellent means of arranging swaps for some tenants, not everyone will have internet or broadband access. Research by Ofcom has shown that less than half of social tenants have internet or broadband access at home (43 and 36 per cent respectively). A similar picture emerges when looking at home internet or broadband access by the 65-74 age group (41 and 33 per cent).

**Financial disincentives:** Average local authority rents in England in 2010-11 were £67.36, whereas the average private rent in England in the same period was £161. Comparatively low rent levels combined with restricted transferability within the social rented sector, length of waiting lists and security of tenure means social housing tenants are effectively 'locked in' to the sector and can face higher living costs if they attempt to exit.

**Allocations and lettings:** The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities the freedom to determine who should qualify to go on their housing waiting list; but the rules on eligibility will continue to be set centrally and reasonable preference categories within allocations systems will still prioritise vulnerability. Owing to constricted social housing supply and falling levels of lettings, these new permissions may not be flexible enough to facilitate significantly greater mobility within the sector.

**Under-occupation:** There is an imbalance between the size and type of properties being sought and what is actually available. Whilst the proportion of larger homes being built has increased in recent years, the social sector continues to need more houses with three or more bedrooms to meet the demand of existing tenants.

## What is Government doing to support housing mobility?

Government has introduced a range of measures to support housing mobility:

**National Home Swap Scheme:** Government has launched HomeSwap Direct, a web-based national scheme that will allow social housing tenants wanting to swap their home to see every available property in the country. The new scheme brings together four internet-based providers of mutual exchange services (HomeSwapper, House Exchange, Abritas and LHS (Locata)) to offer tenants more choice over where they live.

**£13 million DCLG funding to tackle under-occupation:** The Government estimates that there are 430,000 under-occupied social homes in England. This is where tenants have two or more bedrooms more than they require. In some instances these properties are occupied by elderly tenants whose children have since grown up and moved out. Government has announced that 50 councils will be allocated a share of a £13 million to help reduce under-occupation in their areas.

**CIH Making best Use of Stock (MBUS) Team:** With funding from DCLG, CIH has established a Making Best Use of Stock team which provides free advice and guidance to local authorities and housing providers to support them make the best use of existing stock. The team offers strategic advice and guidance and shares good practice.

**Greater flexibility around tenure:** The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities additional freedoms to determine who should qualify to go on their housing waiting list.

**Social housing mobility vanguard programme:** In 2011 DCLG selected 12 local authorities to take part in a series of 'vanguard' projects to assess different and innovative ways of promoting mobility within the social housing sector.

## What can housing providers do to improve mobility?

There are a range of different measures housing providers can put in place to support mobility:

**1. Understanding your stock use, availability and requirements:** Cross referencing waiting lists, existing customer insight information and stock profile information collated from housing management data will enable you to map which properties are required by which households. Trends may emerge, for example in households interested in down-sizing or up-sizing and this will indicate how stock might be used in different ways.

**2. Ask your tenants about their mobility requirements:** Making use of tenant surveys and other sources of customer insight information, identify the housing mobility requirements of your tenants. For example a housing association operating in London and the East of England found that 40 per cent of their tenants who wish to move home would consider moving to another local authority area, and another housing association reported some demand for moving more than 25 miles from their current home. Similarly, changes to Housing Benefit may affect the housing decisions of some tenants and enhancing mobility can support this.



**3. Promote and incentivise moves:** Consider offering incentives to support mobility and publicise this to tenants through flyers, newsletter articles or via your website. This involves encouraging or incentivising individual households to release under-occupied properties for letting to larger households.

CIH has previously published good practice guidance on [Modernising housing advice](#), which identifies a range of mobility incentives including:

- assistance with, or payment of, removal costs
- assistance with other costs such as redirection of mail and reconnection charges
- providing for external storage space
- cash payments
- help with redecorating the property into which the tenant is moving or a decoration allowance.

## Learning from others

**Islington Council** has created Smartmove - a way of matching under occupying tenants with overcrowded tenants. They advertise the under occupying tenant's property through their home connection scheme. Overcrowded tenants (including tenants with no points) can bid to express interest in the under occupied property. A Mutual Rexchange Officer check the bids, sends exact matches to the under occupier and sets up viewings if both tenants are interested.

Islington have now expanded the scheme by producing the smartmove catalogue. This gives overcrowded tenants details with pictures of the homes and what the current tenants are looking for.

**Contact:** Susan Haire 020 7527 4372

**4. Facilitating mobility through better working with other services and providers:** CIH has emphasised the importance of setting mobility within the social housing sector in a wider enhanced housing options approach. Consider holding housing options events and using customer insight information to target specific groups who may be interested in or benefit from moving home, such as older people who have expressed a wish to downsize.

In addition, partnership working with other providers, including Social Services, or the CAB, may indicate that some tenants are struggling to maintain their home or pay their bills. These tenants may be interested in or may benefit from moving home. Work with the private rented sector, housing co-operatives, and other third sector providers to support a wider housing options approach to mobility.

DCLG's mobility vanguard projects will identify cross-service cost-benefits to enhancing greater mobility in the housing sector. Given, that improved housing mobility could reduce costs outside of housing there are a number of potential cross-service beneficiaries:

Reasons why a tenant may wish to move	Cross-service beneficiaries of housing moves
Seeking training and employment	DWP, employers, housing providers with a mixed communities agenda
School education	Local Education Authorities
Anti-social behaviour	Police, Community Crime Partnerships
Disability and ill health	Occupational Health, Social Services, NHS, DWP
Care and support	NHS, Occupational health, DWP, Social Services

**5. Facilitating mobility through cross local authority options:** Making provisions in allocations schemes to support moves within the social housing sector can play an important role in promoting greater social and economic mobility.

Sub-regional choice based lettings schemes are an effective means of supporting this agenda. But even in the absence of such schemes, moves across local authority boundaries can be facilitated through local lettings policies, which for instance could allow for a certain number of properties to be allocated to key workers, to fill a specific skills gap within an area or to householders seeking a move.

**6. Making more effective use of mutual exchanges:** Housing providers can use mutual exchanges to support tenants who want to move without waiting for suitable properties to become available. Some providers now run specific mutual exchange schemes for overcrowded and under-occupied households.

**7. Facilitating mobility through chain lettings:** Some housing providers are using chain lettings where they identify 'chains' of tenants who are able and willing to move into each others' properties. Chain letting helps landlords maximise their rental income while minimising their income loss and also facilitate a number of different moves at once.

**8. Allocations and lettings policies:** Greater flexibilities afforded by the Localism Act 2011 will enable housing providers to frame their allocations policies in ways which facilitate greater mobility. For example, an allocations policy could give priority to under-occupiers interested in downsizing.

In addition, some properties could be 'ring fenced' to support greater mobility and could be offered directly to under-occupiers instead of being advertised through a Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

## Learning from others

**Oldham Council** has completed a successful chain letting involving six households and 4 different social landlords. Two of these households were under-occupying, three were overcrowded and one was a homeless applicant.

By creating a chain and making direct offers of accommodation to the each of the households in it, once a property suitable for household at the head of the chain became available, Oldham Council were able to move all of the households into a property that met their needs. The property belonging to the household at the end of the chain was then advertised through their Choice Based Letting's System.

To facilitate the moves, an officer from Oldham Council oversaw the whole process and acted a point of contact for the families involved.

**Contact:** Zillur Rahman  
[zillur.rahman@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:zillur.rahman@oldham.gov.uk)

## Learning from others

The **Perfect Fit** (South East) scheme operates across 5 London boroughs involving 13 registered provider landlords. This sub-regional scheme allows under-occupiers to move easily between boroughs and across different landlords.

It has a list of under occupying clients identified through the databases of participating landlords and supplemented by referrals generated through scheme publicity and recommendations. Participating landlords make suitable properties available and they are offered to under occupiers from Perfect Fit's database.

The scheme employs a designated Under Occupation Officer to match tenants with suitable properties in order to facilitate moves. In addition, Perfect Fit offers practical assistance with the move.

**Contact:** Nina Morris [NMorris@gallionsha.co.uk](mailto:NMorris@gallionsha.co.uk)



## Total mobility specialists

Working with more than two thirds of the country's landlords, **Housing Partners** are the leading provider of housing mobility solutions. We specialise in harnessing the power of the internet to create innovative technology services that seek to increase mobility for tenants, make the most efficient use of landlords' limited housing stock and reduce the time and money spent managing tenant mobility.



**HomeGuide** is a web-based personalised service delivering housing options and advice in one place making it fully accessible to all.

*"HomeGuide has significantly increased staff efficiencies; by delivering housing options online we've seen reductions in the number of walk-in clients whilst delivering more informed, consistent advice, this has led to increased morale and a more efficient housing options service."*

Nick Kemmett, Homelessness Operations Manager, Swindon Borough Council



**HomeHunt** is a brand new shared allocation system for all housing types, designed by landlords for landlords, **HomeHunt** is a complete, flexible and cost effective solution.

*"HomeHunt has the potential to offer our organisation significant efficiency savings within the increasingly important value for money agenda."* Justin Freeman, Housing Services Manager, CityWest Housing Trust



Created to increase mobility for transferring tenants, **HomeKey** gives you the freedom to manage transfers outside the allocations framework helping you to maximise your non-true voids in order to get more people moving.

*"We were surprised by how quickly we saw the benefits of HomeKey, satisfaction rates increased by 18%, re-let times are 14 days and refusals have dropped by 9%."* Andrea O'Callaghan, Head of Allocations & Lettings, Swan Housing Group



**HomeSwapper** is the UK's market leading Mutual Exchange service, which now includes our innovative new under-occupancy management tool **RightSize**.

*"RightSize allows us to identify an under-occupying tenant which in turn means they become aware that we are here to help and advise them should they need it."*

Cheryl Bucci, Under-Occupancy Officer, Thames Valley Housing



## Useful resources and information

CIH Making Best Use of Stock Team [www.cih.org/MBUS](http://www.cih.org/MBUS)

How to... consider new approaches to allocations and lettings  
[www.cih.org/howtobriefings](http://www.cih.org/howtobriefings)

Modernising housing advice  
[www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR//templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/Modernising\\_housing\\_advice](http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR//templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/Modernising_housing_advice)

Overcrowding and under-occupation (TSA guidance)  
[www.tenantservicesauthority.org/upload/pdf/Overcrowding\\_and\\_under-occupation.pdf](http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/upload/pdf/Overcrowding_and_under-occupation.pdf)

The housing report (CIH, NHF, Shelter)  
[www.cih.org/policy/display/vpathDCR//templatedata/cih/policy/data/The\\_Housing\\_Report](http://www.cih.org/policy/display/vpathDCR//templatedata/cih/policy/data/The_Housing_Report)

Counting costs: The economic & social impact of reduced mobility in social housing (Human City Institute)  
[www.humancity.org.uk/reports/publications/COUNTING%20COSTS%20-%20JULY%202010%20-%20with%20covers.pdf](http://www.humancity.org.uk/reports/publications/COUNTING%20COSTS%20-%20JULY%202010%20-%20with%20covers.pdf)

Mobility taskforce report (National Housing Federation)  
[www.housing.org.uk/publications/find\\_a\\_publication/housing\\_management/report\\_of\\_the\\_mobility\\_taskfor.aspx](http://www.housing.org.uk/publications/find_a_publication/housing_management/report_of_the_mobility_taskfor.aspx)

Mobility matters (Affinity Sutton)  
[www.affinitysutton.com/pdf/Mobility%20Matters.pdf](http://www.affinitysutton.com/pdf/Mobility%20Matters.pdf)



### Chartered Institute of Housing

Octavia House  
Westwood Way  
Coventry CV4 8JP  
Tel: 024 7685 1700

[www.cih.org](http://www.cih.org)