

# Furniture Package Policy

Originator:	Policy and Strategy Team
Executive Management Team Approval Date:	November 2020
Review date:	November 2023

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
1.1	As considerate landlord, One Vision Housing (OVH) provide support to existing customers and housing applicants moving into OVH properties that are vulnerable and experiencing hardship at times when they need it most.
1.2	OVH recognises that due to their personal circumstances or being unable to support themselves financially, some customers require additional assistance to sustain their tenancies or when moving into a new home. One of the ways OVH provides this additional support is through the provision of Furniture Packages.
1.3	This Policy sets out the rationale for allocating Furniture Packages to support OVH customers to sustain their tenancies and the conditions that will apply to customers.
1.4	The application of this Policy also ensures compliance with the outcomes of the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England adopted by the Regulator for Social Housing in England and Wales as outlined below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registered providers shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Treat all tenants with fairness and respect</li> <li>○ Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
1.5	<b>Access and Communication</b>
1.5.1	OVH is committed to ensuring that its services are accessible to everyone. OVH will seek alternative methods of access and service delivery where barriers, perceived or real may exist, that may make it difficult for people to work for it or use its services.
1.6	<b>Equality, Diversity and Human Rights</b>
1.6.1	OVH is committed to ensuring that no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons and will carry out its duty with positive regard for the following core strands of equality; Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Gender Identity / Gender Expression, Sexual Orientation, Religion and/or Belief, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity.

<p>1.6.2</p> <p>1.6.3</p> <p>1.7</p>	<p>OVH also recognise that some people experience disadvantage due to their socio economic circumstances, employment status, class, appearance, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, being HIV positive or with AIDS, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.</p> <p>OVH will also ensure that all services and actions are delivered within the context of current Human Rights legislation. OVH will endeavour to ensure staff and others with whom it works, will adhere to the central principles of the Human Rights Act (1998).</p> <p>The Policy should be read in conjunction with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OVH Complaints, Appeals and Feedback Policy</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><b>Statement of Intent</b></p>
<p>2.1</p> <p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p> <p>2.6</p> <p>2.7</p> <p>2.8</p> <p>2.9</p>	<p>OVH will use Furniture Packages in conjunction with other support mechanisms to ensure customers who are vulnerable or facing financial hardship are given the best opportunities to sustain their tenancies and form lasting roots in the community.</p> <p>OVH will offer a Furniture Package to existing customers or housing applicants subject to criteria and an assessment of need being completed.</p> <p>OVH will deal with all applications for a Furniture Package in a fair and transparent manner keeping applicants informed of any decisions and the reasoning behind them.</p> <p>OVH will not supply gas appliances as part of a Furniture Package (Gas fires or cookers) but will still be required to carry out landlords annual gas safety checks on any gas supply to the property (including where this has been capped off).</p> <p>All furniture supplied as part of a Furniture Package remains the property of OVH at all times and OVH will ensure it is supplied in accordance with the relevant Housing Benefit or Universal Credit regulations.</p> <p>OVH recognises there is high demand for Furniture Packages. To ensure the best use of limited resources and to offer support to those most in need, eligibility criteria will be applied to applicants seeking this type of support or where referrals are made by OVH staff / partner agencies.</p> <p>OVH will ensure that all furniture and facilities provided as part of a Furniture Package meet the relevant British Standards and the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 – Amended 1993 (or subsequent standards as introduced).</p> <p>As a minimum, OVH will arrange for an annual inspection of all items and carry out Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) for electrical goods supplied in all Furniture Packages. Larger electrical items that may be hard wired will be subject to periodic testing, every five years e.g. cookers.</p> <p>OVH will ensure Furniture Packages are affordable for customers at all times. OVH will maintain an open dialogue with Local Authority Housing Benefit Departments and the</p>

<p>2.10</p> <p>2.11</p> <p>2.12</p>	<p>Department of Work and Pensions for customers that will receive Universal Credit to ensure items provided as part of Furniture Package remain eligible for the housing support elements of welfare payments.</p> <p>OVH will also maintain an open dialogue with customers who have a Furniture Package to ensure it does not have a detrimental effect on their benefit entitlement or income should their circumstances change.</p> <p>The Furniture Package budget will be specifically ring fenced for this project.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Policy</b></p>
<p>3.1</p> <p>3.3.1</p> <p>3.1.2</p> <p>3.1.3</p> <p>3.1.4</p> <p>3.1.5</p>	<p><b>Eligibility for Furniture Packages</b></p> <p>OVH will offer a Furniture Package to customers living in both its general needs and independent living stock. All decisions on the eligibility of applicants, or those that are referred to the service either internally or externally, will be made by the ‘Furnished Tenancy Officer’ subject to an approval by the Independent Living Team Leader or Manager in their absence.</p> <p>An assessment will be made of each applicant’s personal circumstances and tenancy issues including rent arrears and anti-social behaviour record. Priority will be given, but will not be restricted to, those that meet one or more of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those claiming Income Support</li> <li>• Those claiming Income related Employment and Support Allowance</li> <li>• Those claiming Income based Jobseeker’s Allowance</li> <li>• Those who receive Universal Credit</li> <li>• Those claiming Pension Credit</li> <li>• Those who have limited household income</li> <li>• Those who need help to stay in their own home and not in residential care or hospital</li> <li>• Those with a family experiencing exceptional pressure</li> <li>• Those who are vulnerable older persons</li> <li>• Those who are fleeing domestic violence or have been referred by MARAC</li> <li>• Those who are young persons’ leaving care</li> <li>• Those moving out of institutional or residential care e.g. hospital, care home or hostel</li> <li>• Those who are ex-offenders leaving prison or detention centre</li> <li>• Those who are chronically or terminally ill</li> <li>• Those who have disability</li> </ul> <p>OVH will give priority to those in greatest need and where complete furniture packages are required, that are likely to provide the most assistance in sustaining a tenancy. OVH will therefore triage all live applications or referrals on this basis.</p> <p>OVH will also assess an applicant’s income to determine their ability to pay for a Furniture Package including benefits entitlement and evidence of other income (i.e. employment).</p> <p>Decisions to allocate a Furniture Package will also be determined by the availability of Furniture Packages funding at the time of the application. If no Furniture Package funding is</p>

available or the applicant does not meet the criteria outlined above, the Furnished Tenancy Officer will provide advice and signpost them to alternative options.

## **3.2 Right to Appeal Decisions**

**3.2.1** Following assessment of circumstances, the Furnished Tenancy Officer will write to all applicants or those that are referred to the service, outlining the decision, as soon as is practically possible.

**3.2.2** Where applicants are refused a package, the letter will outline the reasons for the decision and advise the applicant of their right to appeal (See the OVH Customers, Appeals and Feedback Policy for details).

## **3.3 Furniture Packages**

**3.3.1** OVH will tailor the Furniture Package according to the applicants' needs. Applicants who are accepted for Furniture Packages will effectively be able to choose from a menu of standard items, including white goods and furniture and a charge will be levied in relation to the level of package provided.

**3.3.2** All furniture and goods that are supplied in the Furniture Package will be purchased from new and OVH will ensure their delivery and safe installation once the package required is agreed with prospective customers (usually before a move-in date is agreed or as soon after this date as is practical). This will include the installation of any white goods by a competent tradesperson.

**3.3.3** Depending on their circumstances, applicants that are accepted for a Furniture Package may increase the level of support required at a future date and the charges applied will be amended accordingly.

**3.3.4** After five years, OVH will review personal circumstances of existing customers to assess if their situation has changed; this review will include any tenancy management issues (i.e. rent arrears and ASB record) and ability to pay for the Package (i.e. evidence of benefits receipts). The outcome of this review may mean that the Furniture Package is removed from the customer.

**3.3.5** Customers who have a Furniture Package that need to move from one OVH property to another for any reason, will be allowed to take the package with them when they move, provided it is suitable for their new home.

**3.3.6** In these circumstances OVH will not provide any assistance in the transportation of the items. It will be the responsibility of the customer to ensure the safe transport of furniture items provided as part of a package from one OVH property to another. Customers will not be able to take the package to another housing provider.

## **3.4 OVH's Responsibilities for Maintaining Furniture Packages**

**3.4.1** All furniture and other items supplied as part of Furniture Packages will remain the property of OVH at all times and as such it will be covered by OVH's insurance for flood, fire, theft and accidental damage.

3.4.2	OVH will carry out a minimum of one inspection of Furniture Packages every year, or more often, depending on the individual circumstances of customers. The Furnished Tenancy Officer will check all furniture items supplied as part of the Package is present and its condition to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
3.4.3	OVH will give reasonable notice, in writing, of their intentions to inspect furnished properties and in all circumstances this will be no less than 24 hours.
3.4.4	OVH would normally only replace items on a five yearly cycle but will consider requests for replacement due to wear and tear more often, in exceptional circumstances. Any requests for replacement of this nature will need to be approved by the Team Leader.
3.5	<b>Tenants Responsibilities for Furniture Packages</b>
3.5.1	Customers with Furniture Packages will be responsible for the day-to-day upkeep of all furniture items provided and will need to report to OVH any damage to furniture items as and when it occurs. Customers accepting a Furniture Package will be required to sign for the package and this will then form part of an amended tenancy agreement.
3.5.2	If after thorough investigation, OVH considers damage to furniture items to have been caused by wilful neglect or a deliberate act on the customers’ behalf, they will recharge for replacement costs and OVH will report the damage to the Police.
3.5.3	Customers in receipt of a Furniture Package are obliged to report any theft of furniture items from their properties to the Police and OVH and obtain a crime reference number. Any failure to report theft of furniture items will result in tenants being responsible for a full recharge for replacement costs.
3.5.4	In the unfortunate event of a customers’ death whilst in receipt of a Furniture Package, OVH will provide relatives with an inventory of the items that need to be left in the property when it is cleared of personal possessions.
3.6	<b>Disposal of Furniture</b>
3.6.1	When furniture and other items supplied as part of Furniture Packages are either no longer required or have reached the end of their notional life (5 years), OVH will remove them from properties. An assessment will then be made of the condition to determine their future use.
3.6.2	All furniture will be safely disposed in accordance with the requirements of the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Regulations (WEEE) 2006 – as amended and the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 -Amended 1993.
<b>4</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
4.1	Requests for Furniture Packages will be dealt with by the Furnished Tenancy Officer. The Independent Living Team Leader will have specific responsibility for approving all applications for Furniture Packages.

<b>5</b>	<b>Performance</b>	
5.1	<p>The following KPI will be used to report performance to the Executive Management Team, annually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of furnished tenancies sustained after 12 months of tenancy start date</li> </ul>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Consultation</b>	
6.1	<p>All OVH staff have been consulted in the development of this Policy. Due to current coronavirus restrictions, it has not been possible to consult with the OVH Tenants Policy Review Group. When permissible or alternative consultation arrangements are developed the Policy will be presented to the Group as an information item.</p>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Review</b>	
7.1	<p>The Policy will be reviewed every three years from the date of Executive Management Team approval or sooner if required by the introduction of new legislation or as a result of system audits.</p>	
<b>8</b>		
8.1	Was a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) required?	No
8.2	When was EIA conducted and by who?	EIA Relevance Test was completed on 16/06/2014 by; the Policy and Strategy Manager and Policy Writer and is still relevant for this review of the Policy
8.3	Results of EIA	<p>The EIA Relevance Test indicated there are no adverse or differential impacts for any groups with protected characteristics as a result of the operation of this Policy.</p> <p>The aim of the Policy is to provide services and support to the most vulnerable and in need customers without prejudice or preferential treatment for any protected characteristics they may have.</p>
<b>9</b>		
9.1	Responsible committee for approving and monitoring implementation of the policy and any amendments to it	EMT

9.2	Responsible officer for formulating policy and reporting to committee on its effective implementation	Operations Director – Customer Support	
9.3	Responsible officer for formulating, reviewing and monitoring implementation of procedures	Operations Director – Customer Support	
<b>10</b>	<b>Amendment Log</b>		
<b>Date of revision:</b>	<b>Reason for revision:</b>	<b>Consultation record:</b>	<b>Record of amendments:</b>
02/08/2016	In line with the Review Schedule	See section 6	<p>Inclusion at 3.1.3-assessing applicants for affordability and tenancy management issues.</p> <p>Change at 3.3.4 -Customer circumstances will be reviewed every 5 years.</p> <p>Change at 3.4.5-OVH will conduct a 25% audit on customer documentation, annually.</p> <p>A section of Home Starter Fund has been removed (Now covered under Demand Incentive Policy).</p>
08/10/2019	In line with the Review Schedule	See section 6	There are no significant changes to the Policy in this review.
17 <sup>th</sup> November 2020	In line with revised business practices	See section 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addition of new clause at 3.1.3 outlining 'triage of applicants / referrals based on level of needs'</li> <li>• Revised wording at 3.2</li> <li>• Revised responsibilities at 4.1</li> </ul>