

GUIDANCE FOR SOURCING ACCOMMODATION

DRAFT 1 – 1.7.21

COMMUNITY NURSING RECRUIT PILOT PROJECT

1. REQUIREMENT SPECIFICATION

1.1 This will focus on how many staff need to be accommodated for how long, to what standard and where, which in turn will drive the type of accommodation and whether it's furnished or unfurnished:

1.1.2 **Number requiring accommodation** – is this a one-off recruitment of a fixed number of Community Nurses, or part of a longer-term recruitment policy?

1.1.3 **How long** – different types of accommodation are available for different periods of time (see below), which can impact on cost. It may be more cost effective to pay more for a shorter period, rather than have long term void/empty room costs in a longer term letting. In most cases, International recruits are likely to stay in the provided accommodation for 3 to 4 months before moving into accommodation of their own.

1.1.4 **Standard of accommodation** – a good principal question to work to for this is 'would you be prepared to live in the accommodation yourself?' The number of bathrooms per resident should also be carefully considered. The aim should be for no less than 1 bathroom per 2 bedrooms residents. A large and well-equipped kitchen diner is also probably essential, but a separate living room less so. Aim for accommodation built or refurbished within the last 3 years. Cost can be an issue here, since the ambition is to recharge the recruit the cost of the accommodation on an all-inclusive basis, after the expiry of any free period (usually 3 months) offered. In overall terms, it is important that the standard of accommodation reflects the standards and aspirations of the NHS Trust, and that the new staff feel valued and welcome.

1.1.5 **Where** – should the accommodation be close to the proposed place of work, or in an area close to better non-work amenities? Or somewhere between the two? Can a stranger to the UK easily find their way to work? What are the available modes of travel? Is the journey time to work less than, say, 30mins? In the majority of cases, it is likely that the staff may initially prefer accommodation close to place of work which they can then either walk to or have a short bus ride to. When comfortably settled into their environment and way of life in the UK, the staff will then mostly look to source their own accommodation further afield in areas with amenities suiting their lifestyles – particularly if they have access to a car. The availability of the different types of accommodation in the right areas at the right time will influence what is and isn't possible on this though.

- 1.1.6 **Note** – a degree of compromise on the ideal requirement is inevitable in light of what is available in the marketplace at the required time.

2. TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION

- 2.1 There are a number of different types of accommodation in the market to accommodate various numbers of international staff recruits, including the following: -

2.1.1 **Houses In Multiple Occupation** – increasingly prevalent in places with big student populations, a house in multiple occupation (HMO) is a property which is occupied by three or more people forming two or more separate households, where facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms are normally shared. It includes bedsits, shared houses and some self-contained flats. Landlords of qualifying properties must become accredited and obtain an HMO licence. Public Bodies are exempt from this requirement where they are managing the property. Usually having 5 bedrooms or more, HMOs range widely in standard, but now include some at the very highest end of fitout standards, including ensuite bathrooms and TVs. Tenancy rental costs therefore vary hugely as a result. On the positive side, in university locations there are usually a lot of such HMOs, but availability depends very much on timing. Tenancies of these HMOs follow university year cycles of approx. July to July for minimum 12 months periods, and they are usually offered to rent on the market 6 to 9 months in advance of the July start date. This type of accommodation is, however, ideal for cohorts of multiple international nursing recruits, facilitating peer to peer support, assuming there are enough to keep the property occupied by rotation for the 12 months period. A number of landlords of these HMOs will only deal with students though and will not entertain NHS Trusts or other private companies as tenants (see legal issues below). Equally, some HMO landlords prefer not to deal with students, being attracted to the certainty of payment from NHS Trusts. Tenancy rents of HMOs are also often inclusive of all costs (e.g. utilities, Council Tax, Wi-Fi/broadband, TV licence etc) which has its attractions from a Trust and staff management perspective. These houses nearly always come fully furnished with all principal items of furniture. Soft furnishings and some kitchen items are excluded. These houses also often offer outside garden and amenity space.

2.1.2 **Flats** – suitable for individuals or smaller cohorts of say 1 to 3 staff recruits, upwards of 1 bed in size. Perhaps half of all flats are let furnished/unfurnished. Tenancy lengths range from a minimum 6 months, with most landlords seeking 12 months. Flats can, therefore, be attractive as a slightly shorter-term option. Studios and 1 bed flats tend to be disproportionately more expensive on a per recruit basis than those flats offering 2 or more bedrooms.

2.1.3 **NHS Partner Accommodation Providers** – some NHS Trusts (particularly acute hospital NHS Trusts) have agreements with private providers for large blocks of flats to accommodate the large number of nursing staff they require. These tend to offer individual rooms (often 50 or more) on a building wide basis, and these acute NHS Trusts are often able to offer 3 months occupations to the nursing recruits of other NHS Trusts on a proportionate charge basis. Where available, these buildings are often in good

residential locations and offer great peer to peer support from other nurse recruits, both from the UK and abroad.

- 2.1.4 **Homestay Programmes** – some public bodies, student organisations and NHS trusts have set up and enter into a Homestay arrangement with suitably approved families ready to accommodate individual nurses in their homes [**JY to add]
- 2.1.5 **Short Term/Holiday Rentals** – a number of internet based companies (like www.bookings.com or www.airbnb.com) offer flats and houses to rent for short periods of a few days up to a couple of months, on an all-inclusive basis. These are often more than twice the proportionate cost of the equivalent flat on a longer 6 or 12 months letting but can suit when only one or two recruits need to be accommodated for a short term on a one-off basis. These types of flats are often of a high standard in good locations and can also be suitable for the current isolation/quarantine period requirements.

3. FINDING HMOS AND FLATS TO LET

- 3.1 The majority of privately owned HMOs and flats are offered to let on the well-known internet based property search websites like www.rightmove.co.uk and www.primelocation.com and www.openrent.co.uk. These can be very good sources of properties to let, while also providing details of the individual letting agents active in the specific location being considered. In the current market, the better rental properties either let very quickly (a few days) or are offered ‘off-market’ to registered parties, so it is important to register requirements with a number of these agents, so that you can be considered for such off-market opportunities. Also, bear in mind that not all of the agents will offer the same properties on all websites, so to have the best chance of finding a suitable property multiple searches on multiple websites will be required, including the agents’ own web sites. With the better properties, often the first to view will secure the letting, so it is essential that viewings are arranged as soon as possible. It is perhaps also worth noting here that a personal viewing of the property is probably essential, since a lot of the photos and video tours available online can be years out of date, and the properties look very different in reality. Some agents offer live online viewings in which they walk round and show the flat on a mobile phone camera, particularly when Pandemic visitation restrictions are in place.

4. THE LETTING PROCESS

- 4.1 In the event that a tenancy is sought for a property, it is recommended that an email is first sent to the agent (or landlord) marked ‘subject to contract’ setting out the terms of your offer for the property, principally: the rental offer, proposed tenancy start date, length of tenancy, the full name of the NHS Trust as proposed Tenant, and seeking clarification on the amount of the holding and tenancy deposits plus any other specific terms. If the offer is accepted it is likely the letting will then proceed broadly as follows: -

- 4.1.1 **Holding Deposit** – to reserve the property the agent is likely to ask for a Holding Deposit. This should amount to no more than one week’s rent and should be returnable in the event the tenancy doesn’t proceed, but both these points should be clarified in advance

of payment. On some occasions, the agent might also request an ‘administration’ fee, in which case this is probably not refundable if the tenancy doesn’t proceed.

- 4.1.2 **Application Form** – agents will ask all prospective tenants to complete this to provide them with the information they need to make background checks and to draft the tenancy agreement. The form may ask for the registration number or similar – which unlike the registered companies they are more used to dealing with – but NHS Trusts do not have one of these (being instead set up by Statute).
- 4.1.3 **Approval Process** – at this stage it is prudent to seek the formal authority of the Trust to enter into the tenancy agreement via whatever the relevant process is for this; e.g. via an Estates Approval Report or under the Delegated Authority of an appropriate officer if within financial limits. It is a good idea to make the agent and landlord aware of the time it can take to achieve approval at the outset.
- 4.1.4 **The Tenancy Agreement** – the agent or landlord will draft and send a proposed Tenancy Agreement, usually a standard or generic one of their own that they amend. It may be referred to as an Assured Shorthold Tenancy, but this title of tenancy agreement only applies to personal individuals not created entities like NHS Trusts and registered companies. The tenancy agreement might also be referred to as a ‘Company Let’, but this type of document can equally be used for NHS Trusts. The terms of the tenancy agreement will likely be very similar if not identical to an Assured Shorthold Tenancy agreement. Whilst these agreements are written in a way to be universally understood by individuals, it is recommended that solicitor’s advice is taken if this type of agreement is new to the Trust.
- 4.1.5 **Completion of the Tenancy Agreement** – when drafted and agreed the Tenancy Agreement will need to be signed by a registered signatory of the NHS Trust pending countersigning by the landlord. The Tenancy Agreement is sometimes in simple hard/paper copy, but can also be signed online via process apps like DocuSign. The agent will request payment of the first month’s rent in advance and the Tenancy Deposit (usually comprising a maximum 5 week’s rent if the rent payable is less than £50,000pa) before the landlord countersigns and provides a copy of the completed agreement. If the NHS Trust is using a solicitor for this then the process can also be completed via them. A representative of the NHS Trust will then usually meet the agent on site on the tenancy start date to take receipt of an Inventory (prepared by the landlord or the agent listing what’s in the property and its condition – plus important records of meter readings if applicable and information on broadband wifi codes) and take possession of the property and the keys. Following payment of the Tenancy Deposit, the agent/landlord may choose within 30 days to lodge this with an appropriate Deposit Protection Scheme provider, pending its return at the end of the tenancy. More usually, given that NHS Trusts are created entities (to which it is understood the Deposit Protection Scheme may not apply), the deposit is held by the agent or landlord in a client account. The NHS Trust should also be provided with a number of Statutory notices, like the Gas Safety Certificate.

5. RESIDENT OCCUPATIONAL LICENCES

- 5.1 When the new staff residents arrive to occupy the property, they should be provided with an Occupational Licence Agreement for signing, setting out the terms of their occupation under licence. This can be a generic form of document provided by the Trust's solicitor, usually expiring in a maximum of 6 months. This licence agreement sets out the all inclusive monthly licence fee to be paid by each staff resident on expiry of their free period, plus the notice period required (usually 2 to 4 weeks) when the staff decide they'd like to vacate the property and move to accommodation of their own. It is considered very important that the staff occupiers sign the Licence agreement since it is critical that no tenancy rights are created that threaten the Trust's ability to provide vacant possession of the property back to the landlord on expiry of the Tenancy Agreement.
- 5.2 The resident staff should also be provided with a property and place information sheet providing details of the workings of the property and its appliances etc, plus other information on refuse collection dates and other local services and amenities. This document should also include any Do's and Don'ts while in the property, like no smoking or keeping pets. It is important that the staff residents are provided with 9-5 and Out of hours contact numbers in the event of maintenance or other problems in the property. The terms of the Tenancy Agreement will require that all routine repairs and maintenance are undertaken by the landlord, but it is important that all issues are directed through the Trust as tenant as a single point of contact with the landlord.

6. LENGTH OF STAFF RESIDENT STAY

- 6.1 As stated above, it is likely that most of the staff residents will seek to move out the property within 3 or 4 months of arrival into an alternative home of their own. However, the NHS Trust may wish to adopt a policy of advising the staff resident that they must leave the property within the 6 months licence period.

7. OTHER POINTS OF NOTE

- 7.1 **Accommodation Voids** – it is highly unlikely that all of the accommodation will be occupied for the full time. Allowing for a voids of around 20% is not unreasonable.
- 7.2 **Rental Vs Purchase** – The points made above focus the availability of accommodation to rent. In the event that that nursing accommodation is likely required for a number of years, another option could feasibly be for the NHS Trust to buy, refurbish and maintain a property for the purpose for the period. The attraction of this option could increase in locations where it's not possible to find suitable accommodation (e.g. a large HMO), but careful consideration would need to be given to the cost benefit of this approach. The fact that NHS Trusts do not pay Stamp Duty Land Tax make also render this option slightly more attractive financially.
- 7.3 **Maintenance** – whilst the landlord will likely be responsible for maintaining and keeping the property in full repair, other maintenance and practical assistance may be required of the NHS Trust; for example: clearing blocked internal drainage pipes, freeing and oiling click clack sink plugs, or removing and replacing keys accidentally broken off in the locks.

- 7.4 **Support When Moving On** – thought should be given to how the NHS Trust could support residents when they relocate into a new home of their own. This could take the form of allowing them to keep all the soft furnishings provided to them on arrival at the Trust accommodation, or possibly assistance with relocation and removal costs. In certain circumstances, private landlords can demand a guarantor is provided in support of a new rental tenancy and the NHS Trust could potentially assist with this for a short period.
- 7.5 **Cleaning** – The cost of cleaning the rooms vacated and reallocated in the accommodation should also be allowed for.
- 7.6 **Cultural Practices** – It should be remembered that International Recruits may have different cultural practices that might lead to unintended damage in the property; for example like flooding a bathroom to clean the floor when it is not a wet room, or using a sink and sponge to body wash on the floor rather than in the shower. Dialogue at the beginning will help prevent this.