

Housing Allocations Review and Tenancy Development

Summary of Stage 1 Consultation Feedback

Eligibility/Access

Managing Expectations

- There is no benefit in having a Band 7 as it is costly and gives false expectations as no properties are allocated to this Band
- If access is restricted, i.e. no Band 7, we may not capture all the need e.g. those who may be in need but are in rent arrears or do not have a local connection. (Band 7 should be surveyed to ascertain the needs of this group before deciding whether to remove this ban)
- Work is required with some of the existing Band 7 applicants (who have lived long-term in social housing) to educate and encourage them to seek alternative housing options
- If the numbers on the housing register are restricted greater attention can be given to the remaining applicants, in terms of advice and assistance around the process.
- Applicants with no housing need should be excluded from housing register
- Bring together eligibility of EU citizens to housing where a child is admitted into school together

Un-tenant like Behaviour

- Cannot exclude people from the housing register because of behavioural problems if you do not give them at least one chance.
- Not fair on neighbours to place people in social housing after having many chances and behaviour persists.
- Un-tenant-like behaviour in the now or in the past should not be a reason to reduce priority, because of the difficulty in fairly assessing (a) the responsibility of the individual perpetrator, (who may not be the tenant, but the tenant's family or associates), (b) their mental health condition, substance abuse, offending issues, or (c) subsequent improvements in such behaviour. It remains open to the courts to evict in extreme cases
- Tenancies should not be given to those with any offending behaviour
- Concern about problem families/vulnerable households being placed into social housing
- Chronic anti-social behaviour cases tend to bounce around the system. There will always have to be provision such individuals as we have a statutory duty towards them.
- Placing people into social housing because there is no alternative is setting people up to fail. Suitable accommodation ,e.g. supported housing, is needed as an alternative
- Households with over four weeks rent arrears should be excluded

Financial assessment

- Current financial assessment is too restrictive, should be more flexible. It is an unreliable factor to indicate the ability to rent in the private sector because a deposit and rent in advance is usually required

- Access to the register should be limited to those who are in housing need, and who do not have the resources to buy or rent privately.
- Social housing should be open to everyone regardless of financial means

Connection with borough

- Access should be limited to people who live or work locally, but include those who need to move to the borough to fulfil caring responsibilities that would otherwise fall to the state.
- Should only go on housing register if living in the borough
- People from out of the borough looking for work in the borough should not be given priority because it will make it more difficult for Sutton residents to find work and housing
- Out of borough applicants should be given greater priority if they work, study or have friends or relatives in the borough or previously lived or worked in the borough
- Immigrants should get less priority
- Access should be limited to those in housing need
- People should be able to choose where they live

Priority and banding

Banding

- Length of time of waiting list should determine priority
- Banding system unfair, as people are on register for over 10 years
- Allocation of property should be more transparent – first come first served
- Fewer bands would add to the transparency as well as time waiting on the register taken into consideration
- Current banding is clear except the two bands that relate to homelessness – a bit confusing
- Priority and banding should be determined by age bands (under 50, over 55 & 60) and size of accommodation needed
- Only those with or likely to have overwhelming priority should be fully-assessed at application.
- Applicants that fall in more than one band, should perhaps only remain in the highest band.

Priority Households

- Priority should be given to families to give them the opportunity to save a deposit to buy (suggest these households are encouraged to join the Credit Union or other savings scheme)
- Only people who cannot afford to buy or rent privately should be offered social housing
- Working households on a low income should be given some priority for social lettings.
- Priority should be given to those who are working (could also include voluntary work)

- If people are genuinely looking for employment i.e. have a sense of responsibility they should be given priority
- Prior to allocation of housing, households should be reviewed to check whether they are actively seeking employment or in education
- How would social housing help people find employment? The link is unclear.
- People in work should not be given priority for housing as the most vulnerable, who are often in and out of temporary work, would not be helped
- Contributors to the local community (e.g. carers) could be given some priority
- Contributors to the local community should not be given priority as many people want to contribute but do not have the time or ability.
- Bring back 'sons and daughters' policy
- Need a clear and consistent approach to dealing with households that fall within the reasonable preference categories but who are intentionally homeless
- Priority should be given to overcrowded households, ex-servicemen, single men, those who cannot care for themselves, elderly and disabled (wheelchair based physical disability)
- Greater priority to applicants who have more than one factor to be considered or could group one and two factors and a higher priority for three or more factors.
- Sutton residents should be given priority
- If people need to give/receive care they should get priority
- Households with younger children should be given greater priority than those with older children
- Priority should be given to key workers
- Priority should be dependent on 'needs' and should be means tested
- Greater priority should be given to households living in insecure accommodation
- Those living in private rented accommodation should get priority for housing as accommodation is not permanent
- Issues such as damp and mould should be factors that give additional priority
- Tenants wishing to transfer because of nuisance should be given greater priority
- Transfers that assist carers, combine households, and otherwise release properties should have an element of priority.
- Band 2 (homeless at home) can be removed from the housing register by working with these applicants to seek accommodation in the private rented sector when they first apply. If Band 2 applicants are the adult children of social housing tenants they may require education regarding alternative options to social housing.
- All applicants of working age and without caring responsibilities should be expected to be making efforts to secure employment as part of their contract with the application process.
- Applicants in the statutory homeless band should be given one offer of social housing only, except in special circumstances

Applicability

Non dependants

- Non-dependants e.g. aged 21+year olds should be considered as part of the household for property size required, due the difficulties in obtaining alternative accommodation e.g. deposit for private rented or to purchase.
- Over 21s should be considered part of the original application but not counted on review of the fixed term
- Adult children should only be discounted if they are in employment and over 21 years old
- Adult children should not necessarily be discounted if there is a valid reason why they should included
- Adult children should be considered for size of property allocated. Fixed term tenancies should be allocated in such circumstances to enable review of circumstances and need.
- Adult children should be treated as a separate household unless there are significant caring responsibilities for family members
- Family members aged over 18 should not be added to the household's application
- Adult children living in social housing should only be considered for alternative social housing when they have a family of their own

Bedroom Standard

- Same gender children under 21 should share a bedroom.
- Separate bedroom when same gender siblings are aged 18
- Same sex children should not share where the age gap is 'significant' e.g. 4 year old sharing with a 9 year old.
- Opposite gender should be over age 10 before a separate bedroom is awarded.
- Opposite gender children should not have to share a bedroom
- After age 7, opposite gender children should have a separate bedroom
- Separate bedroom allocated when one of the opposite gender children is aged 13
- Current bedroom standard should remain.
- Current bedroom standard should not be strictly applied but should take into account issues such as disability, autism etc.
- No child should have to share bedroom with a sibling who has serious behavioural conditions such as autism, if it has a negative impact on another child's well-being.
- Joint custody of a child should give priority for a 2 bed property
- Able bodied adult children should not be counted for bedrooms required
- Additional bedrooms should be allocated to households who qualify and intend to foster children
- Rooms should be allocated for carers
- Additional bedroom should be allocated where a child has serious behavioural problems

- Bedroom allocation standard should be the same as the Government bedroom standard and Housing Benefit standard; otherwise households in private rented would be disadvantaged.

Medical Priority Cases

- Bidding from medical priority cases should only be restricted where significant alterations would be needed.
- Household with medical priority should not be limited to suitable properties, they should have choice to adapt
- Households with medical priority should be limited to bidding only for suitable units

Stock Designation

- The height of a property alone should not be the consideration, only the wishes of the tenant.
- Ground floor accommodation should normally be designated for people with disabilities, and homes with gardens, for families with children.
- Households with children should be offered accommodation up to 3/4th floor with a lift
- Accommodation on higher floors should only be given to households with children and people with disabilities if there is a lift
- Sheltered housing should only be for people who are retired, whether because of age or disability. People who are capable of working should not normally be placed in sheltered accommodation, unless they have exceptional needs. There should always be a 'lowest' age limit though.
- Age limit for sheltered should be 55+, depending on circumstances
- Sheltered housing criteria should remain the same
- If sheltered housing is linked to age only, and not on-site support, the designation 'sheltered' should be removed and offered to a wider range of applicants
- Allocation of sheltered housing should be based on need that matches the support being offered by the housing provide

Service Tenants

- Service tenants should be given a more generous bedroom allowance when their property is required for regeneration, and when ordinary residents on the same estate have equally generous terms.
- Service tenancies should be phased out
- Service tenants should not be given greater choice than other applicants
- Service tenants should leave social housing once they leave the job
- Service tenants should be allowed to apply for a move, that does not result in under occupation, to alternative social housing prior to retirement

Lettings

- No-one should have to pay two lots of rent when moving between social housing properties
- Applicants should be given 1-2 months to move in to the new property

- Sufficient time should be given to enable notice to be given to private landlord and to save to buy large appliances as on low income and private rented accommodation provides major items of furniture etc.
- Should become liable to pay rent at the end of a fortnight or month
- Once the keys are given to applicant they should be liable to pay rent

Succession

- This should not be increased from 'one' while there is heavy demand for social housing. It would not be fair for families to pass on their properties in perpetuity.
- Succession rights should be given to carers and children who have been living with the tenant for five plus years
- One right of succession should be allowed
- Additional succession should be dependent on the circumstances of the household at the time
- We should retain the 5 year remaining relative re-housing policy.
- Remaining relative policy should not be applied as a blanket policy

Adapted stock

- To make best use of local stock, including local housing association homes, people should be required to move from specially adapted homes that are no longer required to alternative social housing.
- If a property is adapted and the person requiring the adaptation dies, the remaining tenant should not be compelled to move as it is their home
- Believe there is a moral duty on the local authority to rehouse a person living in adapted accommodation that is no longer needed
- If person not needing the adaptation is likely to need adaptations themselves in a few years, e.g. an older person, they should be allowed to remain even if the adaptations are not needed straight away.
- If adaptations are needed by the occupying household and property is under-occupied, the household should move to a suitably sized property prior to any adaptations being carried out
- An analysis of need versus cost should determine the best use of this scarce resource

Transfers

- Keep waiting list for new applicants only
- The benefit in maintaining separate lists for allocations and for transfers is that different priority can be afforded to each of the groups. This could be adjusted over time, for example, when there is a high level of homelessness, or when there is a greater demand for transfers.
- One housing register for new and existing tenants, the issue is more about priority and date order

- If there is not a prohibitive cost to the HRA, transfers should be allowed onto housing register
- The number of transfers per household should be limited to a certain number during a 15 year period to prevent unnecessary movement and administrative cost.
- Transfers should be primarily for people who have too large, too small or otherwise inadequate accommodation.
- Housing association properties should be included in the local authorities transfer scheme and be able to transfer to LBS properties
- A criteria should be set for allowing transfers into the borough, there must to an identifiable need
- Problem families should not be allowed to be transferred into the borough.
- Management transfers should be allowed where there is neighbour nuisance and the perpetrator cannot be evicted
- Management transfers should be for serious cases of anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, hate crime, decants and refurbishments
- Management transfers should extend to housing associations where the local authority has 100% nominations

Mutual Exchange

- Morally not correct to allocate more bedrooms than needed due to the benefit restrictions
- In certain circumstances mutual exchanges should be allowed to under occupy by one bedroom or to accept a smaller property than entitled to, for the convenience of the exchange (e.g. location).
- Mutual exchanges should be permitted even if that puts one tenant straight into housing need, on the understanding that no priority for another move will be granted immediately following the exchange that led to this position.
- Mutual exchange should not be allowed if this will result in under-occupation
- Under-occupation following mutual exchange only if provide respite or if they foster

Support for vulnerable adults

- Quota system is so tight, and short of property that it is does not really provide a transparent route for people in special need cases.
- Applicants should be bidding in the normal way, but be subject to a single transparent scheme of management transfer.
- Quota should continue rather than blanket policy to place vulnerable people in the private sector, as some private landlords are not good/prejudice and make life very difficult for such tenants
- Difficult for vulnerable tenants to manage in the private rented sector – very little protection, flexibility or support
- Quota applicants could be offered private sector housing if it is appropriate and the applicant wants it

- The use of private sector housing for ex-offenders can sometimes be appropriate and instrumental in breaking the cycle of re-offending.
- Quotas should be cut back
- Private sector options should always be considered, and a stronger fund to boost deposit /rent guarantee assistance be established.
- Private rented sector should be used to discharge duty to problem families
- Move on from supported housing into social housing should not be automatic but based on assessed needs

Flexible Tenancies

Implications of flexible tenancies

- Flexible tenancies will mean less cohesive communities, morally wrong, resulting in fractured and unsettled communities
- Local lettings policies should be developed for particular estates to assist the creation of cohesive communities
- Flexible tenancies will result in greater administration costs, as there will be a greater turn around due to the shorter duration of the tenancies the number of reviews is likely to increase.
- People who have a home for life are more likely to keep it in good condition and feel a positive commitment towards the community around their property, whereas short term lets may result in less care being taken.
- Fixed term tenancies would be moving on the very householders who are likely to provide community cohesion; by paying rent, and being committed to their communities. This in turn could cause disruption to schooling and employment, family and friends, caring responsibilities and other networks.

Applicants to be offered fixed term tenancy

- All applicants should be offered fixed term tenancies, although some will continue to be extended depending on the households' circumstances
- If applicant has employment in the borough offer fixed term tenancies should be offered
- Fixed term tenancy should be given depending on circumstances of household
- Could have fixed term tenancies as long as there is something in place to offer people at the end of the term
- Fixed term tenancies should be used for persistent rent arrears cases, unsociable and abusive applicants
- Use renewable fixed term tenancies as an incentive for good behaviour
- Use fixed term tenancies for people on low income. As income increases you would be expected to leave the tenancy
- Providers of social housing should ideally offer the same terms as the Council

Duration of tenancy

- Social housing tenancies should be for life because private sector rents are too high
- Flexible tenancies should be linked to the property, in which case households living in larger properties would be given a shorter term tenancy
- The duration of the fixed term of the flexible tenancy could be linked to a factor that is appropriate to that particular household and linked to the original circumstances, e.g. age of children, employment etc.
- Suggested fixed term tenancy duration should be for a minimum of 1, 5, 10, 20 years.
- Length of term for fixed term tenancies should vary for different households
- Fixed term tenancies up to age 65 and then required to move to suitable smaller accommodation
- Tenancy should be for life as it would be difficult for older people to find alternative accommodation after children have grown up. Such a move would also be emotionally upsetting.
- Life time tenancies should be given but not necessarily of the same dwelling provided the move is not forced upon a family prior to identifying a suitable property to move to. This would have the benefit of requiring households in social housing to free up larger, or adapted properties, that are no longer required, rather faster than at present, so they can be used by families who do need them.

Review of fixed term

- The extension of the fixed term can be determined after a review of circumstances
- Unfair to require tenant to move out of property if they have made improvements – can avoid this by telling them they will have to move at some point at the start of the tenancy
- If children have grown up and they are under-occupying, tenant should be required to move to smaller property.
- If fixed term accommodation is offered to help them to save to buy property, there should be a proviso that they must join the credit union and pay into it to help them to save
- If short term tenancies are provided to help people to save for a deposit for a mortgage, check need to be put in place to make sure this time is not being abused.
- There should be the facility to extend the term of the tenancy if the tenant has genuinely not been able to save. The extension should be for a shorter term e.g. 6 months
- An income bar can be imposed. On review of the fixed term, if they earn more than the income bar their tenancy will not be renewed. However, this might encourage people to leave work at/prior to the review.
- Fixed term tenancies should only not be renewed if the tenant exhibits disruptive behaviour, breach of tenancy after support is offered
- Flexible lifetime tenancies should not be renewed if the tenant exhibits anti-social behaviour
- Should have regular reviews of household circumstances and if they are under-occupying accommodation they should be required to move to alternative social housing

- As some working households will never have enough money to buy a property, tenancies should be for life
- If problems arise during the term of the tenancy the duration should be renegotiated
- Should provide incentive rather than requirement that tenants move out of larger under-occupied tenant e.g. high standard of alternative smaller accommodation
- If people are expected to move to a smaller property after a period of time, the availability and standard of the alternative smaller accommodation should be high
- If applicant is offered a fixed term tenancy and does not accept the terms offered what is their status on the housing register?
- It is important that whatever policy is introduced in this area, local housing associations sign up to it too.
- Housing associations should make best use of their stock/client and decide independently about the type of tenancy to provide

Standard of property

- There should be a requirement for a deposit for all lets into social housing. This would encourage tenant-like behaviour; sociable behaviour, care of property, payment of rent.
- Short term tenancies should be let to a higher standard; good condition, maintenance of the property, floor covering and support vulnerable tenants and tenants whose behaviour may affect residents living near them
- If fixed term tenancies are given, inspection of properties should be carried out and the tenants fined for damage
- A deposit should be taken if the accommodation is furnished and let to a higher standard
- Social services and occupational health should liaise to make the alternative accommodation as suitable and attractive as possible.

Affordable Rents

- Rents at Affordable Rent levels could discourage people from attempting to get back/into employment, depending on the level
- All rents should be affordable
- Different intermediate housing products may be useful to have as an alternative to both social housing and Affordable Rent housing e.g. one year renewable tenancy which requires one month deposit
- Affordable rent levels should not be as high as 80%
- Affordable rent should not be more than 60% of the market rent
- New build social rented housing should be charged at 80% market price
- Approach to larger families regarding Affordable Rent should not be any different
- Right level of housing benefit (or its successor within universal credit) is the vehicle by which housing should become affordable, not by artificially charging a percentage of market rates.

Who should housing be for?

- People in short term housing crisis
- People whose lives are always going to be difficult should be given preference, e.g. people with a disability
- People who have a chronic need and if they are not housed at the right time their behaviour may worsen, e.g. ex-offenders, people with substance misuse problems, mental health problems

Perceptions of social housing

- Social housing should be a tenure of choice not of last resort, which is usually the case.
- Young professionals do not choose to go on the housing register for social housing because they do not know what type and quality of housing they are going to get and there is a lack of choice about the neighbourhood they will move into.
- A very high percentage of social housing residents are in receipt of housing benefit, which could evidence the fact that they are in this tenure because of a lack of choice
- Council housing is perceived as an unattractive tenure to people who have not previously lived in social housing.

Support for social housing tenants

- There is an expectation that social housing providers should offer support to the more vulnerable households and clients who exhibit challenging behaviour.
- There is little tolerance of people with mental health problems from housing management staff, with an expectation that there should be greater social services support for these individuals when the support services have to cut costs.
- Housing providers find it difficult to provide ongoing management for more challenging clients. This is difficult to maintain with such limited staff resources

Misc

- Will Sutton become a popular area for people who cannot afford private sector rents in central London? If so, what will that mean for people trying to rent in the borough?
- It is expected that in the future private rents will go down, in line with LHA rates
- An income-based rent, which operated in Vancouver, was mentioned. This system links the person's income and rent. Rent is capped to ensure that no tenant ever pays more than one third of their income. This system encourages responsibility for one's own housing and removes the dependency on the welfare state. However, it may be a disincentive to work in the UK as housing benefit can be claimed.
- Research has shown that there is no housing need; it is just that people are in the wrong housing.
- Need to have 'mixed tenancies' to avoid 'sink estates' – social housing should be aspirational

- Belief that there is insufficient stock to move under-occupiers into suitable accommodation
- If universal credit does not reflect local house prices that will lead to migration within the UK, possibly unaffordable estates, and more pressure to subsidise market rates.
- Council should set up a scheme to help owner occupiers who need alternative accommodation e.g. buy back her Council accommodation to enable them to be considered for more suitable social housing.