

# Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee Meeting

Mulberry Place - MP701  
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# Discussion on service related issues, and proposed amendments to Tower Hamlets CHR Allocations Scheme

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Options

## The CHR Allocations Policy was last amended -1 November 2016

### Primary drivers for this review:

- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – require reasonable preference applicants threatened with homelessness or actually homeless
- to ensure policy meets needs of our residents and key aspirations and objectives of the Council

CHR partners fully engaged in discussions and have given feedback

There are currently five proposed  
policy changes

Proposals 1 and 5 require further  
refinement before formal consultation  
is initiated

# 1. PRS offer to prevent homelessness

Applicants threatened or actually homeless and rehoused in private rented sector with assistance from the council to be allowed to join or remain on the list for 3 years.



- Presently applicants cannot join the housing register unless resident for at least 3 years or in housing need.
- If policy amended, suggestion is it to limit it to 3 years
- Explore giving all of those housed out of borough in PRS priority during this time limited period e.g. band 2B, even if they are adequately housed.
- Only applies where homelessness prevented by the Council through an out of borough PRS offer.
- It will relieve current pressures on the service and offers an alternative solution for applicants in need of housing

- Future MHCLG funding is likely to be linked to number of preventions LAs achieve
- Once applicants establish a local connection with the borough of their placement they will be able to apply for housing or, if tenancy is lost, for assistance as homeless
- Prevent vulnerable people housed in expensive private sector accommodation in Tower Hamlets – experiencing issues of rent arrears.
- Borough residents may question why applicants living out of borough are allowed to join housing list and rehoused
- Risk applicants may get offered housing by host borough, which will require close scrutiny

## Private Rented Sector lets achieved in recent years

2017/2018 - 55 discharges

2018/2019 58 discharges

	Prevention	Discharge	Total	In Borough	Outside Borough
2013	50	11	61	33	28
2014	21	55	76	67	9
2015	24	3	27	22	5
2016	26	0	26	13	13
2017	16	21	37	28	9

## 2. Releasing Larger Size Units

Offer ground floor properties to under occupying social housing tenants on 1st floor or above who have no medical recommendation for ground floor only accommodation.

### Example

Mrs A who is a Council tenant lives in a 4 bedroom property on 4th floor, wants to move to a ground floor home but does not need ground floor accommodation on health grounds



# Advantages



It will free up much needed larger size properties

Assist those under-occupiers affected by the bedroom tax

Potentially facilitate more chain-lettings

Officers will retain discretion to offer such properties to non-under occupiers where this would free up a larger home or house priority decant tenant.

### 3. Ground floor 'flats' to applicants recommended a flat by health advisor.



Officers given 'discretion' to do this where appropriate

4-bedroom ground floor flat available to let

**Example 1** - Mrs Cole needs a 4 bedroom property on health grounds and recommended ground floor only but can manage internal stairs – house or maisonette will be suitable.

**Example 2** – Mr Bailey also needs a 4 bedroom property and has medical priority and recommended ground floor only property but cannot manage internal stairs. Mr B has lower priority in Band 1 than Mrs C.

High priority under occupying tenants, management and decant tenants or applicants recommended 'ground floor only' accommodation are being picked for flats at present ahead of those applicants that cannot manage internal stairs.

Under current policy Mrs Cole will be picked for this ground floor flat because she has higher priority but Mr Bailey must be rehoused to a flat as per medical recommendation.

Mr Bailey consequently will have to wait significantly longer for a ground floor flat, especially as he needs larger size unit that are in limited supply.

## 4. Reduce residential condition for Victims of Domestic Abuse (DA)



- Waive the 3 years residential criteria for applicants accepted as homeless and place in Band 2A and not Band 2B
- Prioritise applicants in Refuges under the move on quota (through Band 1B) after 3 months instead of 6 months minimum residency in the borough, to release vacancies for other victims of DA.
- Victims of DA not offered a lesser tenancy than what they previously held.

## 5. Band 3

**Remove existing applicants in band 3 that are adequately housed with some exceptions**

Limit Band 3 to following categories of applicants:

1. Applicants over 50 years of age
2. Applicants requiring sheltered accommodation
3. Out of borough housing applicants placed there as part of homelessness prevention offer
  - Potentially 14% of applicants in Band 3 will remain even if a decision is made to remove the remaining adequately housed applicants from this band.

- Initiate debate because applicants in this band are not in housing need - 41% (8160 applicants) of all households registered on the housing list
- Raises expectations
- Expensive to maintain and manage this band of applicants – staffing cost approximately £135,000.
- The 5% quota reserved for Band 3 cases tend to go exclusively to applicants over 50 years of age and needing sheltered accommodation

## Total numbers in Band 3



There are 8160 applicants in Band 3 - 1 February 2019

Beds required	Number of applicants
1	5486
2	1708
3	861
4 plus	105
Total	8160

# Alternative Housing Options and Support



- Secure suitable accommodation in the private sector
- Mutual exchange for existing tenants
- Housing Moves - Pan London mobility scheme for social tenants
- Homefinder - national mobility scheme for social and homeless tenants
- Intermediate housing/homeownership/shared ownership – depending on their financial circumstances.



# Alternative Housing Options and Support



- Keyworker housing for eligible applicants
- Ask MO on-line toolkit offers housing options plan based on individual circumstances of applicants.
- Explore and, if feasible, develop on-line intermediate/PRS advertising option for residents
- New PRS funding secured from MHCLG will enable council support private landlords and tenants to ensure they fulfil their obligations under law and terms of the tenancy agreement.

## Next Steps – Formal Consultation

- **Review of proposed changes and impact, recommending any modifications**

- Members and some stakeholders consulted. Benchmarking with other boroughs and more detailed consultation will be carried out with all stakeholders before final policy changes are agreed by Cabinet.
- Impact will be on band 3 applicants who will be removed but they have very little or no chance of every being made an offer
- More detailed impact assessment will be carried out.

- **Maximising engagement through proposed consultation strategy**

On-line; focus group meetings with residents, staff and stakeholders; meetings with DLTs and TRAs; some direct mailshot where feasible e.g. medical and DV cases.

# Other Service Related Issues

## A. Policy compliance and transparency in housing management panel decisions - casework examples/resident views – overview of how it works.

- Panel meets on a monthly basis – considers exceptional circumstances cases not covered by Allocations Policy
- Referrals usually made by landlord but can be by others e.g. social worker
- Tenants can seek a review – first considered by the Panel and subsequent review by someone more senior than the Panel Chair.
- Each case considered on its merits, a recent example of a case: management priority awarded because panel considered tenant was a risk from ex-partner whose was due to be release from prison (referral from DV team)
- Allocations policy paras. 154 -204 cover discretionary housing priority. Extenuating or emergency priority may be awarded.

## B. Improving the quality of temporary accommodation in Council and PRS stock



Housing Officers (HO) work on geographical patches covering TA based in Greater London, Essex and Kent

25% increase in T/A since 2017

HOs reduced 12 to 10

Property acquisition programme - consolidate and reduce nightly lets

Team will be impacted by Income Centralisation programme – obvious increase work, we remain responsible for household changes, bidding and repairs

50% of TA situated in most part of Greater London, Basildon in Essex and Chatham in Kent.

# Improving the quality of temporary accommodation in Council and PRS stock



## Repairs

- Council tenancies information booklet outlining key processes and contacts given at sign up
- Buybacks and Non Secure Tenancies (Council) – report to Tower Hamlets Homes via on-line or THH repair telephone number.
- PRS placement – given the contact details. At the accommodation check-in providers are required to give clients full information about the property including contact details for repairs.
- HO intro letter sent and a settling in visit carried out shortly after a client moves into the accommodation. HO ensures the client knows how to report any future problems.
- HOs are out most of the time and will pick up any voicemails left

## **What happens if things go wrong**

- Where repairs not carried out satisfactorily , HO will chase and if required standard not achieved tenant is transferred and property is placed on banned list.
- Provider will be invited for a meeting, and no properties will be procured unless council satisfied provider will fulfil their obligation.
- Providers are provided with a document setting out the standard expected
- Procurement team regularly meet with providers and will raise any complaints received

## **Future plan**

- Exploring if HOs telephone calls can be managed by another team
- Set up a generic email address for clients to access the team
- Improve information on the council's website on how and who to report repairs and property issues.

# Review of medical assessment decisions and appeals processes, service performance and complaints, exploration of in-house delivery



## Health Assessments

Will only be awarded where a household member has a severe, long term limiting illness or a permanent and substantial disability including mental illness or disability

**AND**

their health and quality of life is **severely affected by the home they live in.**

A priority medical award is not given on the basis of the medical condition or disability alone, but on how this is affected by the current living conditions.

Allocations policy Paras. 127-153 cover medical applications



1. Mobility cases assessed by OTs, all others by Nowmedical
2. Mental health cases considered by consultant psychiatrist from NowMedcial
3. Appeal always considered by a different OT or Health Advisor and **Council's decision is** signed off by a more senior officer, e.g.:
  - No priority awarded initially but a report from an Early Intervention Support Worker lead to medical priority being awarded by manager.
4. Over 1400 assessments completed 2018-19
5. NowMedical Costs
6. 

2017/18	£43,812.
2018/19	£41,758
7. Council had an in-house team many years ago, it was significantly more costly; finding people with right expertise and timely assessments were major challenges.

# C. Criteria of acceptance of EU nationals, and likely impact of Brexit



A EU citizens living here continuously for 5 years by Dec 31st 2020 will be eligible for settled status (indefinite leave to remain)

Those living here for less than this term will be eligible for pre-settled status (leave to remain). Those granted pre-settled status will have the same rights as now and will be eligible once the five years' continuous residence has been achieved for settled status.

The person will need to make a valid application and not to be refused because of serious or persistent criminality.

- Required to upload documents onto an on-line portal (not available yet) and/or
- By allowing the Home Office to contact HMRC and other databases to help prove residence/duration of stay.

For the vast majority of applicants this should work well

# Main concerns



Concerns that EU nationals might fail to comply with the processes

- Vulnerable individuals such as women subject to domestic abuse, victims of modern slavery, rough sleepers, the elderly including those with dementia, others with mental health problems or those with complex physical health problems
- Possibly children of those who for other reasons fail to apply for status
- Perhaps children in care/care leavers
- Those who for no obvious reason may fail to apply within the time limits
- Non-computer literate and/or those who might struggle with linguistic barriers.
- There may be individuals particularly amongst those arriving close to the end of December 2020 who will struggle to provide evidence of residence - no footprint in the UK yet

# Impact and mitigation



All those who fail to achieve pre- or settled-status will effectively be NRPF as of the 1st July 2021.

Potentially significant financial burden on local authorities

## Things to do

- Raise awareness including with community groups
- Need to identify EU nationals who are being assisted by social services or live in our own social housing, help these people to document residence
- Controlling Migration Fund – some work already being done through this project