

Proposed changes

1. Access to the Housing Register: what is the current arrangement?

Household size:

The Allocations Policy currently states that anyone who normally resides with or can be expected to reside with the applicant can be included on the application. This can lead to some extended households including people in the application which makes the application into one for a much larger home; and the Council has very few larger homes.

What are the proposed changes?

Household size:

There are circumstances which are not covered by the current wording describing a household in the Allocations Policy, where it would be helpful to have a clearer definition of who can be included in an application. These two areas are:

- children where a family has split up; and
- adult siblings or relatives in law of the same generation, such as sisters in law, or brothers in law.

We propose to define who can be included in the application as

- the immediate family (to include children and parents);
- dependent children to be included only for the parent where there is a Residence Order in place or where Child Benefit is in payment;
- adult siblings or in laws only to be included where there is a need to provide care or receive care from them.

Why are we proposing to change it?

Household size:

The Council has very little larger stock: only 222 four bed homes (1.3% of the housing stock) 9 five bed homes (0.06%) and only one six bed house; and obviously these become available very rarely. It is therefore not helpful to larger extended families to allow them to register for homes which are unlikely to become available.

We think therefore it is sensible to enable only households to register immediate family members for rehousing together, unless additional extended family members either receive, or provide care for the household.

The second change we are proposing is to make it clear that a child can only be included in an application if they live with the household more than half of the time, and with the parent who has a Residence Order, or receives Child Benefit for that child. Households where the parents have split up often share the care of children of the family, but it is not possible for the Council to provide accommodation to both parents as though the child were living with both households, due to constraints in supply. We propose therefore to include wording in the new Allocations Policy to make this clear. This change is in line with current practice in the Housing Options Team, but it is not explicit in our current Policy and could therefore be subject to challenge.

Who will it affect and how?

Household size:

There are 201 households registered for homes in households which include a person who is not an immediate family member. 63 of these are registered for four or five bed properties.

In future they will be obliged to make separate applications for housing, unless the person included in the application either provides care to the family or cannot live independently and receives care from the household.

42% of these households were of either White or White Other ethnicity; 54% were from an ethnic minority (of which the largest proportion – 25% were African). 4% declined to give their ethnicity. 54% of these households were female headed whilst 46% were male headed households.

It is proposed that this change is implemented for all new applicants, and for current applicants when their application is subject to review.

2. Referral groups: - What are the current arrangement?

There are a range of vulnerable groups supported within Adult Social Care and Children's Services, and in some cases, external agencies such as the Hestia, who run Barking & Dagenham's Women's Refuge. The main vulnerable groups are: people with an enduring mental health condition, people with learning disabilities, Children Leaving Care, survivors of Domestic Violence and certain ex- offenders

Currently, one of the workers from these services or agencies approach the Community Solutions staff, on an ad hoc basis when their client needs to move from their current housing, which might be an institution or supported housing.

The Community Solutions staff will seek to assist such cases when accommodation is available, but with each case being dealt with on its merits. Where this process does not provide a suitable option at the point the person is ready to move on, they may be obliged simply to make an application through the homelessness legislation (such as a Domestic Violence case), or remain in unsuitable accommodation, preventing the release of the supported housing to others who have need of such accommodation.

What is the proposed change?

We are proposing to develop an annual Allocations and Lettings Plan which will set an estimated number of homes to be allocated to each need group, based on forecasts of supply, demand, needs and costs. In addition, a cross-council Joint Assessment Panel (or Panels) will be established to agree which cases will be considered for rehousing and which housing option is the most appropriate. Decisions about allocations in these cases will be based on the following criteria:

- An individual or household's level of independence and ability to manage an independent tenancy
- The financial cost of different housing options to the Council

- The appropriateness of the current and proposed housing solution.

Why are we proposing to change it?

We believe that this will create a more planned pathway for moving vulnerable groups from institutions or supported housing into independent accommodation (while ensuring that decisions about the allocation of a very scarce resource are taken in a planned and contextualised way). It should help to prevent housing emergencies arising in the lives of vulnerable people and stop valuable resources of supported housing becoming “silted up” and therefore the Council being unable to assist other people with a higher level of care need. It will enable collaborative working between the different arms of the Council to share their expertise.

Who will it affect and how?

This change will affect vulnerable households who are being assisted by Adult Social Care and Children’s Services to move into independent accommodation with support. This change will also affect women who are fleeing their homes because of domestic violence. After the initial period of trauma, recovery and support from the staff at the Women’s Refuge, they will be able to plan for a move on from this emergency accommodation, either to a return home with additional protection, or to a new home where they can rebuild their lives.

3. Agreeing a more transparent process for the allocation of sheltered, extra care and adapted properties - What are the current arrangements?

Sheltered Housing:

There is a dedicated officer who assesses the Sheltered housing in the borough. Sheltered housing consists of independent flats – bedsits or one bed flats, in a group with some communal facilities such as a lounge, laundry, office and garden. There is an emergency call system, and in addition a member of the support staff will make a regular call to ensure that the residents are healthy and assist them with some tasks. They are let in line with the main Allocations Policy, which emphasises the importance of housing need in deciding who gets housed, and in what order. There is no mention of sheltered housing in the current Allocations Policy.

Extra Care Housing:

Extra Care housing is a set of flats or apartments which are rented or owned by individuals. There is communal space, including a lounge, dining room and meals service; a hairdressing area and sometimes a fitness room; and medical services such as a consulting room and space for other health services to be delivered on site. Extra Care schemes offer a greater degree of support than Sheltered Housing, in order to enable individuals to remain independent as long as possible. A Nomination Panel reviews applications that have been referred through health or social care agencies, and decisions are made on making offers to applicants based on their housing and care needs. There are Extra Care schemes in the borough, owned by Registered Housing Providers, and the Council also has a draft proposal to develop other Extra Care Housing.

Adapted housing:

There are currently around 360 households on the Housing Register who need adapted housing. A dedicated officer in Community Solutions assesses the cases so that the

Council is clear what the disability is and how it can best be met. However, only between one and two adapted properties become available every month and therefore households with a member who has a disability face long waits for appropriate housing.

The Allocations Policy currently has a short section on the process for allocating adapted housing in which it is stated that adapted properties will be let by direct offer, but it does not mention the criteria by which such lettings are made. In addition, the current Policy states that an Accessible Housing Register will be introduced in the future in order to enable disabled applicants to bid for properties. This proposal has not been taken forward. An Accessible Housing Register is a way of labelling and recording the adaptations that exist in each property suitable for people with mobility needs. It is useful in ensuring that such property is let to the people who need it.

Currently, although it is not clearly stated in the current Allocations Policy, adapted properties are let in accordance with the criteria for general needs properties (Additional Preference Band and Waiting time). However, this may be modified by the nature of the adaptation in the property and the adaptation required by a household. For example, fully wheelchair housing will be let to those with a need for such housing, rather than someone with a more moderate mobility need, even if they have a greater number of Reasonable Preference requirements or have been waiting for a longer period of time. If there is a medical emergency that requires more urgent rehousing out of the ordinary waiting time, then an offer can be made under Delegated Authority

What are the proposed changes?

Sheltered and Extra Care housing:

We are proposing to:

- Develop an Allocations and Lettings Plan which will provide an estimate of the number of sheltered and extra care properties that will become available during the course of a year;
- Establish a Joint Housing Assessment Panel between Community Solutions and Adult Social Care
- Ensure all cases of older people in housing need are discussed, with the aim of agreeing the best solution for each case.

Sheltered housing offers a community of older people living together, providing mutual support and companionship; and emergency on call services if there are any health emergencies. Extra Care, as its name implies provides on-site care at a higher level, including a meal offer. Some households need rehousing but would be happy and able to remain independent in general needs housing with some support.

Decisions about allocations in these cases will be based on the following criteria:

- An individual or household's level of independence and ability to manage an independent tenancy
- The financial cost of different housing options to the Council
- The appropriateness of the applicant's current housing and proposed new housing solution.

In considering this, the following factors will be relevant:

- Frailty
- Physical or mental health need
- Multiple health problems

- Sensory impairment
- Loneliness and isolation
- Safety and security issues
- Age

Adapted housing:

The new Allocations Policy will set out explicitly the criteria which are currently used to decide how to allocation lettings adapted properties. These are set out in the paragraph above on the current arrangements.

Why are we proposing to change it?

Sheltered and Extra Care housing:

We feel that we are not making the best use of our Sheltered and Extra Care housing stock, and their special features. By allocating sheltered housing based purely on housing need, people have moved into Sheltered Housing who have no support needs, and therefore the facilities available are not being used to their best effect. With Extra Care, the process of letting these homes has been done by Adult Social Care without in put from the Community Solutions team, who just administer the decisions made by ASC. This change will produce a more transparent and collaborative process leading to better decisions on the choices available for older people in Barking and Dagenham.

Adapted homes:

For adapted properties, the arrangements for letting adapted homes will become more transparent, and households will be able to better understand how their application is dealt with.

Who will it affect and how?

Sheltered and adapted homes:

This will affect older people who want to move to a more supportive form of housing. Currently priority is given to those who have a housing need, or who are returning a larger home to the Council.

Households and individuals who need to move for health and social care reasons, such as mobility problems, or who are suffering from social isolation will benefit from the change. The Council will also benefit from a more effective use of the support provided by Sheltered and Extra Care accommodation.

Adapted homes:

These changes will affect households who have a member with a mobility need. They will be able to see more clearly how their application is dealt with.

4 Under occupiers - What are the current arrangement?

Currently households who are under occupying their homes do not appear in the Allocations Policy list of priority bands. The Allocations Policy does state that households who are under occupying their home may be made a direct offer of housing, as it is in the Council's interest to free up larger homes for other households on the Housing Register.

In addition, a household who is under occupying their home, and who is being considered for an offer of a smaller home, may, at the discretion of a Council officer, have any rent arrears disregarded, unlike other applicants who are tenants.

What is the proposed change?

We propose to increase the priority given to households who are under occupying their homes, by including them in the highest band of priorities (so that they can bid for a home if they choose to do so) and to ensure that they will be successful, alongside tenants who are moving because their homes is being demolished.

We will also use the opportunity of the Allocations Policy to draw attention to other ways in which under occupiers can move (such as the GLA's Seaside and Country Homes scheme).

We also propose to set a target of the number of under occupiers we will aim to move each year, as part of our Allocations and Lettings Plan (see above).

Why are we proposing to change it?

Households who are under occupying their homes and have one or two spare bedrooms may well be attached to their home, and reluctant to move. This is understandable. However, at the same time, we have 5,477 households on the Housing Register who need housing, and leaving under occupiers in the larger homes, is not the best and most efficient way of using social housing. If we can give additional priority to households who are under occupying and find ways of helping them move to more suitable smaller accommodation, we may be able to help both parties at the same time – those in housing need, and those who are living in homes which are too big for them.

Who will it affect and how?

There are currently 159 households on our Housing Register who have expressed a need for smaller accommodation, including 1 household in a 5-bed property, who only needs a two-bed property. These are the people who have registered for a move – which means that they are interested in moving, although they are likely to be particular about what they are willing to move to. If the household is under pensionable age, and in receipt of benefit, their benefit will be reduced to reflect the size of accommodation that they need (“the Bedroom Tax”). However, the majority of under occupiers are older people.

Current beds	Need 1 bed	Need 2 beds	Total
2	78		78
3	51	27	78
4	2		2
5		1	1
Total	131	28	159

80% of those who are registered as under occupiers are White, or White other (including Irish) whilst 13% are from an ethnic minority. 9% declined to say what their ethnicity was. 62% were female headed households, and 38% were male headed households.

Apart from those who have registered for a move, there are a greater number of under occupiers in social housing who have not registered for a move. Recent housing research suggests that there is considerable under occupation in the social housing sector and scope for additional pro-active work in this area.

5 Clarifying the process for senior management discretion in exceptional and emergency cases - What are the current arrangements?

There are occasionally cases which require a decision to be made outside the current Allocation Policy arrangements. The main examples of these are Management Transfers (where a household must be moved because of violence or threats of violence that has occurred– such as harassment) and Succession cases (where someone who is not entitled to succeed to a tenancy has a powerful compassionate reason to remain in the home or at least be rehoused). There are other exceptional cases which cannot be forecast. Decisions of these kind need to be made by an officer using appropriate policy criteria and appropriate delegated authority. Occasionally it is helpful to discuss cases between the manager of the property (My Place) and the manager of the people issues (Community Solutions).

Management Transfers:

There is a current Management Transfer Policy in operation which was adopted by Cabinet 9th March 2016. This enables households where there is a threat to life and limb to be rehoused urgently. There are conditions which include:

- Officers to investigate the threats
- The move must also be in the Council's interest
- The applicant must move into temporary accommodation
- The applicant can bid for a property, but if they are not successful in 6 months, then one direct offer can be made

Succession cases:

When a tenant dies, and there is an occupant remaining in the property, a decision must be made about whether they are entitled to remain in the property. Currently, a spouse who was living with the tenant is entitled to succeed to the tenancy, if there has been no previous succession. A partner who has been living with the tenant at least 12 months at the time of death can also succeed to the tenancy. Whether or not another member of the family can succeed to the tenancy depends upon

- The date the tenancy started
- Whether there has been a previous succession

Whether the property is the right size for the person remaining in the property

For all tenancies created after 1st April 2012, there is no right to succeed to the tenancy for family members other than the spouse or partner. There is a Succession Policy, adopted 9th March 2016, which enables the Council to allow a person who is not entitled to succeed to the tenancy (such as a family member who has been living with the tenant for at least 12 months at the time of death) to succeed to the tenancy, where they would otherwise be homeless and become the responsibility of the Council under the homelessness legislation. This is not permitted where the property has been adapted, and there is no longer anyone living in the property who needs that adaptation

What is the proposed change?**Management Transfers:**

The proposed change is that Management Transfer cases should be approved by the Director of Community Solutions in consultation with the Director of My Place, under delegated authority only in exceptional circumstances, and where necessary referred to a newly formed Assessment Panel, made up of representatives of Community Solutions and My Place. Decisions should be made in line within existing policy.

One offer of similar accommodation should be made, in line with the household's assessed needs, and if the offer is not accepted, then Management Transfer status will be removed.

Succession cases:

The Policy will remain the same, but discretionary succession cases will be approved by the Directors of My Place and Community Solutions with delegated authority and occasionally referred to a new Assessment Panel dealing with Management Transfers and other exceptional cases if there are exceptional circumstances which need to be discussed.

Why are we proposing to change it?

It is helpful occasionally to discuss solutions to difficult cases between the parties affected (the organisation managing the property, My Place and the organisation managing the people's situation, Community Solutions) to ensure that all aspects of the case are considered.

It is also helpful to ensure that all discretionary cases are recorded, and decisions made in an open and transparent way. The delegated authority will enable urgent cases to be dealt with appropriately and the Joint Panel (between My Place and Community Solutions) will provide an opportunity to discuss both the property and people implications of each discretionary case.

Who will it affect and how?**Management Transfers:**

This will affect households who have been the victim of hate crime such a racial harassment. Where the Council has assessed the case as one which needs urgent rehousing, the case will be discussed by a Joint Panel of My Place and Community Solutions to ensure that the best resolution of the case is agreed. There were 13 cases in 2016/17 of this kind of situation.

Succession cases:

People who live in a Council property, where the tenant has died will be affected by this; but the Policy will not change; it is just being administered and decided in an open and transparent way.

6 Improving access for local people to Reside homes: - What are the current arrangements?

Rented Homes:

The Allocations Policy for Reside homes is included as part of the Council's overall Allocations Policy, and it is proposed that this arrangement will continue. Reside hold properties let at 50% of market rents, 65% of Market rents and 80% of market rents. The properties let at 50% of market rents are let in accordance with the main Allocations Policy and there is no minimum income threshold. However, the properties let at 65% or 80% of market rents have a separate policy which states that:

- There is a maximum household income of £66,000 pa for a one or two bed property and £80,000 for a three or four bed property
- There is a minimum income requirement which states that an applicant should not be spending more than 35% of their gross income on housing costs
- Income is defined as earned income, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit but no other benefits
- Reside will carry out credit checks on the applicant(s)
- Applicants will be required to produce passports, evidence of immigration status, 3 months' pay checks, 3 months bank statements, 3 years' proof of residence
- Applicants are required to pay one months' rent as deposit and one months' rent in advance

Where applicants have passed all these tests, then priority is given to applicants living in the borough, then after that applicants working in the borough, and after that applicants living anywhere in London.

Shared Ownership homes:

The Council has built a number of Shared Ownership units, which are properties available applicants on a part buy, part rent basis. They are designed to offer low cost home ownership and enable households to get on the housing ladder, if they are unable to afford outright ownership. Some of these homes are owned by the Council (in the HRA), and some are in the ownership of our Local Housing Company, Reside. Currently they are sold on a first come, first served basis. Given the expansion of the programme of Shared Ownership stock, it is important to have a more explicit policy to ensure that local households benefit from this programme of development.

What is the proposed change?

Rented homes:

We are proposing to change the minimum income test in the following ways for Reside properties at the Intermediate rent levels (currently let at between 65% and 80%):

- To include in-work benefit entitlement (e.g. Local Housing Allowance and Working Tax Credit, to be subsumed in time into Universal Credit) as part of the household income
- To include Personal Independence Payments (PIP) as part of the household income (for working households)
- To set the minimum 'affordability threshold' at 40% of household income
- To include earned income as household income where the applicant or partners is working at least 16 hours at least the minimum wage

- To allow applicants who have been paying more in rent than the rent on the Reside home they wish to access for more than 12 months without falling into arrears
- Require Reside to maintain an active register of local working households that would like to access a Reside home (both rented and shared ownership)

Shared Ownership homes:

We are proposing to adopt an explicit policy which will give priority to local residents first, so that if properties are available to sell on a shared ownership basis, the first priority will be for local residents to buy them; and after that people working in the local area, or who have another connection, such as a relative living in the Borough.

It is important that shared ownership properties are sold and not left vacant, so the Policy will ensure that if there is no applicant with a local connection ready to buy the property, then properties will be advertised more widely for sale, so that they are all occupied and used. However, they will not be available for people who are already home owners; and they will only be available to people who need somewhere to live.

A copy of the draft Shared Ownership Policy is attached as Appendix 2.

Why are we proposing to change it?

Rented homes:

Reside Homes are let at less than full market rents and are designed to assist working households in Barking and Dagenham facing high rents in the Private Rented Sector.

In order to be able to let more of the Reside Homes to Barking and Dagenham residents, we need to alter some aspects of the income threshold test to reflect the reality of what households are having to pay in the local market, while also being mindful of the vital importance of high rent collection levels for Reside to deliver its income return to the Council.

Shared Ownership:

There is no current written policy setting out how the Council wishes to allocate shared ownership homes, either those owned within the HRA or those owned and managed by Reside. The proposed Policy will fill this gap and ensure that properties built by the Borough, and with Borough resources are available first to local people.

Who will it affect and how?

Rented homes:

This change will enable more working households in the borough, including those on the Housing Register or living in temporary accommodation to access homes let by Reside at 65% or 80% of market rents. We know that there are 1,557 (about 28%) working households on the Housing Register; but we don't know how much they earn, as we do not record or verify their income at this stage.

It will also enable households who are currently successfully paying more than 40% of their income on their rent, to apply for Reside homes which may improve their financial position and give them more disposable income.

Shared Ownership homes:

The proposed Policy will encourage local people on moderate incomes to get their first step on the housing ladder. Shares of 25% initially will be available, in order to ensure that households with relatively modest incomes are able to buy.

The Policy will provide a more open and transparent way of enabling these homes to be sold, rather than selling them to the first comers.