

**London Borough of Barking
and Dagenham**

More Choice in Lettings

Allocation Procedures

Decants

There is a significant decant programme underway which will continue beyond the introduction of More Choice In Lettings on 1 April 2005. In order to maintain continuity within the current programme, it is proposed that residents of The Lintons, London Road and Cadiz Court will be made offers of suitable accommodation in the area of their choice. Their date of tenancy will be used to determine priority.

Tenants affected by future decant programmes post the introduction of More Choice In Lettings will be encouraged to bid for properties of their choice. Their date of tenancy will be used as the effective bidding date and assessed housing needs will determine the size of accommodation the tenant can bid for.

Should a tenant fail to make a successful bid, a direct offer will be made within six months of the target date for completing the decant, to avoid any delays in the programme. Tenant's who exercise their right to bid will fall within band 1, for the purpose of prioritising the bid.

Management Transfers

A management transfer is a special procedure that recognises a tenant's urgent need to move. However, as a management transfer should not be seen as an alternative route to re-housing, it is only applied in a limited number of circumstances: threat to life or limb, escalating threats to a person and where a property is in need of major repairs.

Supporting evidence from other agencies such as the Police, Social Services and Domestic violence groups is essential to achieve a management transfer under current policy.

It is proposed that a fourth criteria be added to the Management Transfer Procedure. Community Housing Managers should have the discretion to recommend a Management Transfer where they are satisfied, despite lack of Police evidence, there is persistent offensive harassment which could prove more damaging to a household's welfare and quality of life than a less frequent, more serious threat. The recommendation will be countersigned by the Project Leader for Re-Housing and Homelessness and the Head of Landlord Services.

In view of the urgency involved with Management Transfers, one direct offer of suitable accommodation will be made. Should the tenant decline a reasonable offer, they will lose their Management Transfer Priority and revert to the bidding process in More Choice In Lettings.

Key Workers

The current policy for Key Workers provides for 5% of voids to be allocated to this group. The applicant must work in the borough but is not required to live in the borough. The Key Worker policy for Barking and Dagenham defines this group as Teachers, other Council staff and other Public Sector workers.

It is proposed to abandon the fixed quota of 5% and identify Key Workers as a special scheme which will fall into Band 1. For the purpose of bidding however the criteria for accepting other Council staff as key workers will be dependent on the following:

1. The member of staff is a permanent employee
2. There is a genuine problem of retention and recruitment to the post

3. The employee is not resident in the borough

Any request for council employees to be housed as a Key Worker must be recommended by a Head of Service.

Other Special Schemes

A number of direct referrals classed as 'special' are processed under the current policy, such as care-leavers and clients with learning difficulties. It is proposed that all such clients are given the opportunity to bid. However, whilst this client group will not be precluded from bidding we will endeavour to make direct offers to care-leavers to ensure continuity of the Council's parental responsibilities.

Exclusions from Bidding

All persons eligible to apply to the More Choice In Lettings scheme will be eligible to bid. The only exceptions will be violent offenders and sex offenders.

The Public Protection Multi Agency Panel will collectively decide on a course of action to manage the risk to the community.

Allocations Policy in Respect of Rent Arrears

At present Council tenants who accrue rent arrears that reach £200 are automatically suspended from bidding for accommodation. The rent account must be clear for 26 weeks before the suspension is lifted. When assessing a suspension, consideration is given to tenants who pay their rent 4/5 weekly when they receive their salary and consequently fall between credit and arrears.

It is proposed that all eligible applicants may bid for accommodation, and subject to a current clear rent account, the successful bidder will be allocated the property. However, the Allocations Manager will have discretion in extenuating circumstances where the rent account is in arrears to waive the exclusion. Extenuating circumstances such as

- ◆ a delay in processing a new Housing Benefit Claim The allocations manager will give regard to the fact that submission of a claim for Housing Benefit, will not automatically mean that the tenant will be entitled to Housing Benefit
- ◆ arrears accrued due to monthly rent payments where the account is consistently clear when the rent is paid on a regular basis.

This will apply to both Council and Private Sector tenants.