

Consultation on proposed changes to the Bexley Housing Allocations Policy

The London Borough of Bexley is proposing some changes to its current Housing Allocations Policy and is keen to give everyone, regardless of whether they are on the Housing register, the opportunity to have their say on our new allocations policy before it is finalised.

The main proposed changes to the policy and the priority bandings are summarised below along with a copy of the current bandings and the proposed new bandings. If you would like to participate in the consultation process then please go to www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BexleyAllocations where you can respond to a survey and have an opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. The consultation period started on Monday 11 March 2019 and will close on Friday 31 May 2019.

Background

The existing allocations policy has been in operation since 2013 and since then there have been significant changes in the demand and supply of social housing in the London Borough of Bexley. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has also come into force in April 2018 and placed new duties upon local authorities. The existing Allocations Policy now requires revision to better reflect the new duties, local circumstances and priorities.

In designing the revised allocations policy consideration has been given to the local priorities and needs identified in the draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2018 which is currently being developed. Research into local housing services data and allocations policies of neighbouring boroughs has been undertaken and some Councillors have also contributed to the creation of the policy through a specially formulated Scrutiny sub-group on allocations.

The revised policy is being designed to ensure that the properties that are available are allocated to those people with the highest level of need. It is also being designed to meet the new duties imposed by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and to allow the council to make better use of private rented sector properties in a market place where demand is increasing and the supply of social housing is reducing.

Proposed changes to the existing policy

The main proposed changes to allocations policy are summarised below:

- The addition of an income threshold as a qualifying factor so if you earn over a specified amount or have capital over a specified amount then you will not be eligible to join the housing register.
- Amendments to ensure that reasonable preference is extended to those who are at the Prevention and Relief stages of a Homeless application, as required by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Separating out the different categories of homeless people so that applicants that are homeless and owed a main duty fall within priority band 2, applicants that are homeless and owed a prevention or relief duty fall within priority band 3 and homeless people who are intentionally homeless or not in priority need fall within priority band 4. The community contribution category for Homeless People in Band 2 has also been removed.
- Members of the Armed Forces to be given a higher priority with those falling within the armed forces category moved up from a Band 4 to a Band 3 and those within the Armed Forces category who also fall into one of the reasonable preference categories being awarded a Band 1 priority.

- The community contribution category in Band 4 for people who do not have any other priority to be removed to ensure that the register only reflects those in priority need and who are unable to secure alternative accommodation.
- Provision to be made in the policy so that larger households who are overcrowded can bid on a property that is smaller than their assessed needs if the landlord agrees and it will improve their current situation.
- A 3 offer policy to be included meaning that failure to attend, accept an offer or fail to sign a tenancy on 3 successive properties will result in removal from the housing register.
- The way that the housing needs assessment is calculated to be re-worded to make it clearer and to amend the ages for sharing rooms. Under the proposed new policy two children of the same gender will be expected to share a room until they are 18 years old instead of 16 years old as is currently the case.
- Specific reference to be included to the use of private rented property as a qualifying offer of housing and provision has been made for applicants to remain on the register for 2 years if they accept a private rented property offer.
- It is proposed that for people with mobility needs this should be focused on the highest two categories of need (mobility A and mobility B) and that the lowest level of need (mobility C where the household has a member with some mobility needs who is able to manage up to two steps to access the home) should be removed.
- Clearer wording to be included for the definitions of the priority bandings and for the medical criteria and how this is assessed.
- The circumstances in which homeowners can be added to the register to be clarified
- The revised policy will explain that from time to time the bidding system will be closed for a specified number of weeks to allow bidding only from transfer tenants to allow them an opportunity to exercise choice and move to a different location in the borough.

The current priority bandings can be seen below at Appendix 1 and the proposed changes to the priority bandings can be seen below at Appendix 2.

Current Priority Bandings

Band	Category of Need	Criteria
1	• Under occupiers	Social housing tenant who are under occupying their property.
	• Overcrowded	Households who are statutorily overcrowded.
	• Exceptional cases (including Social needs)	Life threatening situations where there is an overriding priority on medical or social grounds. Very serious social needs supported by Social Services and requiring urgent assistance.
	• Prohibition or Demolition Order	The property currently occupied has a legal order enforced meaning it cannot be used.
2	• Homeless people making a Community Contribution	Applicants accepted for housing under the Housing Act 1996 who are making a Community Contribution.
	• Medical	Cases with a medical priority.
	• Redevelopment & regeneration	Residents who are required to move due to a regeneration scheme.
	• Homeless people in emergency accommodation	Applicants accepted for housing under the Housing Act 1996 who are currently within emergency accommodation.
3	• Overcrowded	Residents who are overcrowded according to the bedroom standard.
	• Homeless People	Applicants accepted for housing under the Housing Act 1996 who are not currently occupying emergency accommodation and are not making a community contribution.
	• Young People Leaving Care	Young people leaving care at the age of 18 or over.
4	• Applicants for Sheltered Housing	Applicants who are applying for sheltered housing who have no other priority need.
	• Community Contribution	Those who are in employment, volunteering or vocational training and do not have any other priority.
	• Armed Forces	Those who have left the armed forces in the past five years and other categories relating to service in the armed forces.
	• Transfer Tenants	Social Housing Tenants in the borough who do not have any other priority.
	• Homeless People	Homeless people who are not eligible for housing under the Housing Act 1996.

Proposed Priority Bandings

Band	Category of Need	Criteria
1	• Under occupiers	Social housing tenants who are under occupying their property.
	• Overcrowded	Households who are statutorily overcrowded.
	• Exceptional cases (including Social needs)	Life threatening situations where there is an overriding priority on medical or social grounds. Very serious social needs supported by Social Services and requiring urgent assistance.
	• Prohibition or Demolition Order	The property currently occupied has a legal order enforced meaning it cannot be used.
2	• Armed Forces with an additional reasonable preference need	Those who have left the armed forces in the past five years and other categories relating to service in the armed forces and also have a need which is given reasonable preference under the legislative requirements.
	• Homeless people owed a main duty	Applicants who are homeless under the Housing Act 1996 and are owed the main S193(2) duty when the 189B Relief Duty comes to an end because they have been assessed as being in priority need and unintentionally homeless.
	• Medical Grounds	Cases with a medical priority.
	• Redevelopment & regeneration	Residents who are required to move due to a regeneration scheme.
	• Overcrowded	Residents who are overcrowded according to their housing needs assessment.
3	• Homeless People owed a prevention or relief duty	Applicants owed a S195 Prevention duty or S189B Relief duty for as long as that duty is owed to the applicant
	• Young People Leaving Care	Young people leaving care who are aged 18 to 25 years old
	• Armed Forces	Those who have left the armed forces in the past five years and other categories relating to service in the armed forces.
	• Applicants for Sheltered Housing	Applicants who are applying for sheltered housing who have no other priority need.
4	• Transfer Tenants	Social Housing Tenants in the borough who do not have any other priority.
	• Homeless People	Applicants who are homeless under the Housing Act 1996 but have been assessed as intentionally homeless or not in priority need.