

Review of Housing Strategies

Housing Allocation Scheme

October 2020

Part 1- approved Nov 2019:

- Housing Strategy
- Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

Part 2- December 2020:

- Housing Allocation Scheme
- Tenancy Strategy & Policy

- Statutory requirement under the Housing Act 1996
- Outlines who will get social housing in Harrow
- The aim of Harrow's housing allocation scheme is to:
 - meet local priority housing needs
 - make the best use of Harrow's very limited social housing stock
 - be fairer to all by ensuring that the relatively few residents who are in the most need of housing, wait a much shorter time than before for an allocation of public rented housing.

- Applications are assessed in line with Harrow's Housing Allocation Scheme.
- If eligible they will be advised of:
 - their priority band
 - their entitlement (maximum number of bedrooms)
 - their priority date
- Applicant can ask for a review of the assessment decision.
- Housing Needs should be notified of changes in circumstances.

- The bands were reviewed in December 2015.
- The bands are:
 - A+ Emergencies and Under-occupiers
 - A Urgent and High Priority
 - B Standard Priority
 - C Non-urgent
 - C- Initial preference

- Choice based lettings (CBL) schemes allow applicants on the housing register (waiting list) to bid for council and housing association properties advertised by the council that they are eligible for.
- Some councils use CBL, others make direct offers instead, some use a mixture of CBL and direct offers.
- Harrow Council is a member of the **Locata** CBL scheme.
- Harrow Council mainly uses CBL, with some direct offers- as outlined in the Housing Allocation Scheme.

- Very few new lettings each year, so choice is very limited.
- All applicants with a housing need (band A+ to C-) can bid, which encourages the idea that if they wait long enough and bid regularly they will get social housing.
- Households with an urgent need to move do not necessarily place bids for the first suitable property advertised on Locata, or they refuse properties after viewing. They remain in unsatisfactory conditions for long periods of time, waiting for an ideal property.
- Some applicants do not attend viewings, despite having bid on a property, been shortlisted and been invited to view.

- Reasons for refusals include size, location, no parking and no lift. For Housing Association (RP) properties these also include the rent being higher than Council rents and no Right to Buy.
- Refusals have a negative impact on void times and rent loss for the Council and RPs.
- Some low banded households are offered social housing which should have gone to households with urgent housing needs, which undermines the message that applicants face a long wait for social housing, raises expectations and discourages applicants from exploring other housing options.
- Need to be clear so that all households can make realistic decisions about their housing options.

- We previously consulted on whether we should keep the Choice Based Lettings system or suspend the Choice Based Lettings system for a period and use only direct offers instead.
- Following the consultation with stakeholders we have listened to the feedback and we are now proposing to keep the current Choice Based Lettings system.
- Instead we will implement more robustly the penalties for not bidding and for repeated refusals and review again in 12 months.

- We will proceed with proposing minor amendments to the Scheme to address changes in law and other issues including:
 - the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
 - the latest Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities
 - Income Levels to Access Social Housing
 - Housing Associations that have merged
 - Changes to West London and Pan London schemes
 - 6 changes detailed in the next slides.

1) Sheltered Housing

Current position:

- All sheltered applicants awarded Band B
- If urgent awarded Band A general needs but prioritised for sheltered-difficult to administer
- Demand outstripping supply

Proposal:

- Banding to be introduced for Sheltered Housing for Older People:
 - A) Urgent Priority
 - B) Standard Priority
 - C) Out of Borough Applicants
- As in the current scheme, applicants can be considered and banded for either general needs housing or sheltered housing, but not both.

2) New council owned housing used for temporary accommodation

- Council developing some new housing funded through the General Fund that then moves into the Housing Revenue Account.
- Used as temporary accommodation (TA) until it becomes council social housing.
- Allocated to Accepted Homeless households close to being rehoused in date order and other Accepted Homeless households with an urgent need to move due to unsuitable Emergency Accommodation or Temporary Accommodation and decanting from regeneration properties.
- Allow current temporary occupants to be offered a secure tenancy of the property they occupy when it moves from the GF into the HRA and can be let as social housing (e.g. Gayton Road scheme).
- Subject to suitability of the property and there being no recent tenancy issues such as arrears or ASB.

3) Local Lettings Plans

Current position:

- Scheme allows an agreement between Housing Services and a housing provider.
- Sets out how properties will be allocated in exceptional circumstances to meet area specific issues, for a specific block or estate.

Proposal:

- Allow Housing Services to implement a Local Lettings Plan for its own housing stock, with delegated authority for the Portfolio Holder to authorise a Local Lettings Plans proposed by the Director.
- Purpose is to have a planned approach to the letting of high density/high rise schemes to ensure sustainable mixed and balanced communities.

4) Over 50s Blocks

Over 50s Blocks

- Some properties were previously designated for people aged 50 years and over.
- Over time and through the Right To Buy the age mix has changed.
- We are proposing to end these types of allocations as the blocks are no longer occupied only by over 50s and there is no reason to prioritise this group.

Local Residence criteria

- The Local Residence criteria will be removed for applicants
 - a) moving because of domestic abuse and
 - b) who are travellers.
- In line with statutory guidance and recent court cases.

6) Applicants accepted homeless by another council

Applicants accepted homeless by another council

- There is an anomaly in the current scheme where applicants accepted homeless by another council are given higher priority than those accepted by Harrow Council.
- We propose that this be corrected and that they also be awarded Band C.

Share your view on the proposed changes to
the Housing Allocation Scheme
by answering the survey.

Please contact
housing.strategy@harrow.gov.uk with any
queries.