

Annual Review of the Housing Allocation Scheme

Victoria May

Service Manager (Housing Options)

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Introduction

- Every Local Authority is required to publish a Housing Allocations Scheme
- This policy sets out the Council's priorities for how social housing in the Borough of Gravesham is allocated, and the guidelines which determine entitlement and eligibility to social housing.
- The broad objectives of the scheme are to:
 - To ensure we are letting properties in line with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.
 - Determine the priority of applicants in a clear, transparent and consistent way.
 - Allocate affordable housing fairly and to those in greatest need.
 - Provide accurate and timely advice and information to allow applicants to make informed choices about their housing options.
 - Create sustainable communities by the use of local lettings plans.
 - Make the best use of the housing stock within Gravesham, ensuring that vacant homes are let quickly and efficiently.
 - To give applicants a choice of housing accommodation, or the opportunity to express preferences about housing accommodation, where this is reasonably practicable, by using choice-based letting.

Background

- The current Allocations Scheme was revised in February 2021 and this proposed some key changes including:
 - Extending the local connection period from 2 to 3 years
 - Refusal sanction – 12 month suspension for refusing an offer of accommodation
 - Increased priority for armed forces personnel injured in service or for their families who dies in service
 - Removing people with no housing need
 - Increased priority for all housing under-occupying social housing – Band A
 - The introduction of the Allocations panel
 - Removing band B medical so that there were 2 awards (A & C)
- Following agreement the Housing service stopped advertising all homes for 2 weeks and worked intensively to ensure that the significant changes were made.
- The new scheme went live on 1 April 2021

The Allocations Panel

The Housing Allocations Panel comprises of a group of three or more officers with at least one representative from the Housing Allocations Team, the Housing Options Team and a consistent independent Service Manager from within the organisation that is not connected to the Housing Service.

The panel may also invite other relevant partners to attend, including but not limited to the Community Safety Team and other partner landlords. There is no right to review a decision made by the Housing Allocation Panel.

Due the volume of reviews we initially received following the introduction of the revised scheme in April 2021, review meetings were held weekly, they are now held monthly.

Feedback

- Since the Allocations Panel commenced in April 2021 the panel have reviewed 223 cases (up to end of Feb 22).
- The Panel has recognised that expectation of customers is very high
- The Panel has been used as a learning platform specifically in key areas that need to be clearer in the Allocations Scheme

Key changes following the review

1.0 – Introduction - The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed new duties on local authorities across England to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation when they need it.

2.1 - Residential criteria – Ensuring that employed and self employed people are treated the same but placed a minimum working time of 16 hours

3.2 – Medical and welfare – Ensure that under supported accommodation we add Wrotham Road to ensure this group of people are prioritised in line with other supported accommodation.

3.7 – Included reciprocal arrangements under direct lets

5.2 - Outstanding housing related debt – Ensuring that we are clear that we can suspend during their time on the Councils housing register and is not applicable just on verification.

7.1 - Making an application - Updated this area to reflect current practice.

7.2 – Who can be included on applications – Tightened this area to ensure that we only consider household members that would ordinarily be expected to reside with you and that currently reside together.

7.6 – Keeping the register up to date – Reflected the rolling annual review that is being introduced across Kent in April 2022 and changed the time frame to provide supporting documents from 28 day to 14 days.

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8.1 – The Allocations Panel – Updated this area to ensure the chair (senior manager) is not notifying the customer as this can be completed by the Allocations Officer.

8.2 – Consideration of offers and refusals – Updated to ensure language is correct and also ensure that we detail if they do not respond to correspondence or fail to attend a viewing they will be suspended for 12 months and be unable to bid.

Appendix 1 - This visually may look different and the following changes :

- The initial 'statement' under each band has been removed
- Consistent language in line with the banding reason on the system
- Included prevention duty to band D low housing need to ensure customers in threat of being homeless can go on the Councils housing register despite not having an 'identified need' other than a threat of being homeless.
- Removed band B 'accepted homeless households with additional needs' currently 1 household will keep this banding.
- Reciprocal acceptance under band C from other local authorities

Conclusion

The Housing Service is responsible for the Housing Allocation Scheme. It is important that we review the scheme annually and follow any changes to the relevant legislation or regulations.

In line with the Housing Allocation Scheme, Authority to introduce minor amendments is delegated to the Director (Housing) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing Services.

Therefore, the changes outlined within this presentation will be made to the existing scheme, and the document will be update and available on our website from 1 April 2022.

Thank you for listening



Any questions?