

Annual Review of the Housing Allocation Scheme

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Introduction

- Every Local Authority is required to publish a Housing Allocation 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 Allocation Scheme was revised in March 2022 and this proposed some key changes including:

- Introduction - The Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Residential criteria – Ensuring that employed and self employed people are treated the same but placed a minimum working time of 16 hours
- Added Wrotham Road to ensure they were captured under supported accommodation banding.
- Included reciprocal arrangements under direct lets
- Outstanding housing related debt – Ensuring that suspension can happen at any time.
- Making an application - Updated this area to reflect current practice.
- Who can be included on applications – Tightened this area
- Keeping the register up to date – Reflected the rolling annual review
- The Allocations Panel – Updated this area to ensure the chair (senior manager) is not notifying the customer
- Consideration of offers and refusals – Updated to ensure language is correct and 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.

Key changes following the 2023 review

- Clarified exceptions to the suitable size accommodation - To ensure that those requiring an additional bedroom the person is in receipt of a qualifying disability benefit and we have medical recommendations from a professional.
- Introduction of pre-void inspections for Gravesham tenants wishing to transfer - This will be at the point of applications and will consider the condition of the tenants existing home and ensure your property is in reasonable condition. Where there are concerns identified advice, signposting and support will be provided to help you bring the property up to standard.
- Verification for an under-occupying Gravesham tenant to establish the date they had an additional bedroom so that for the banding date assessment can reflect this giving them a greater position on the housing register, housing quicker and freeing up larger homes.
- Introduction of Band A reviews every 6 months to ensure we are supporting those households in critical need. In the event a household is not exercising their right of choice, a suitable direct let can be offered, or a reassessment of their circumstances/priority can be conducted.
- Ensure a clear pathway for care leavers by including them under welfare need to ensure appropriate banding to avoid them going through the homeless route and into temporary accommodation.

Band changes

- There are currently 24 band reasons within band A to D.
 - 13 in band A
 - 4 in band B
 - 5 in band C
 - 2 in band D
- Throughout the transition work to Huume we have the opportunity to review and streamline these banding reasons in line with the existing housing system we use.
- There are a number of 'unused' band reasons and therefore upon transition we will remove these reasons moving forward.
- Given the number of band reasons this makes reporting more challenging.
- Changing the banding reasons will provide a more consistent approach to officers and customers.
- When Huume is implemented customers banding and position will not change.

This slide provides greater detail into the changes that have been made within the banding reasons.

Band A

- Ensuring we have a clear banding reason for urgent medical need and urgent welfare need
- Removal of Environmental/Safety as if this is imminent risk to life then this would be dealt with through Private Sector Housing and a Prohibition order will be served (so applicant would be offered emergency accommodation)
- Removal of Demolition Order / Compulsory Purchase as this can be fed into Management Move.
- Combine Armed forces regardless of medical / homelessness

Band B

- Removal of Armed Forces end of tenancy as they will now be placed in band A

Band C

- Introduction of Homeless Prevention band reason from 1 July 2023 when transition to new housing system. This will be for customers that are owed a Prevention or Relief Duty and there is a local connection to Gravesham.

Example case study

Each case will be assessed based upon facts on the file and there is no one same scenario and therefore it is common that cases can be complex and detailed investigations are required to take place to determine banding position. Using an example of a single person insecurely housed and sofa surfing they could be placed in one of more bands dependent on their circumstances and below provides reasons for this:

Band A

If the single person declared that they had past or present medical conditions that is made worse by their current accommodation we would be required to verify this. If there was a significant medical condition that made their existing home completely unsuitable then we may consider an immediate need to move and therefore agree band A position.

Band B

The person could be living with poor property conditions. Band B would be awarded if the hazard(s) identified pose a threat to the health and wellbeing of the occupants but where there is no immediate danger or it is not life-threatening, and remedial action is considered unreasonable or impractical.

Band C

A single person who is rough sleeping could be awarded band C once verified.

Band D

A single person who is sofa surfing could be awarded band D.

The New Banding

Band A – Critical Housing Need

- Urgent Medical
- Urgent Welfare need
- Management move
- Under occupying social housing
- Overcrowding
- Armed Forces

Band B – Urgent Housing Need

- Overcrowding
- Move-on from supported housing
- Environmental/safety

Band C – Reasonable Preference

- Homeless temporary accommodation
- Homeless Prevention – NEW from 1/7
- Rough sleeper
- Overcrowding
- Medium medical
- Medium welfare need

Band D – General Housing Need

- Older Persons Housing
- Low housing need

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 April 2023.

It will be necessary to carry out a further review of the Allocations Scheme in winter 2023/24 to ensure it is reflective of current practice given the new system implementation.

Thank you for listening



Any questions?