

Allocations Policy Review

January 2021

Background





What the allocation policy is for

- One of housing's most important and impactful policies
- The policy defines who is the most in need of social housing and who is likely to get it
- Sets out the way in which the council will nominate households to council and RP stock given nomination agreements
- The policy must reflect our strategic priorities, including the use of the PRS



The current LBL allocations policy

- LBL allocations policy was last substantively updated in 2012 and further changes were made in 2017.
- There have been big changes in demand for accommodation over that time, especially a substantial increase in homelessness.
- In recent years Lewisham have used an Annual Lettings Plan each year to support the letting of social housing in line with our priorities.
- The allocations policy had become misaligned with the priorities highlighted by our ALP
- We need to renew our allocations policy so that it reflects the priorities and challenges our residents and partners face as a result of the housing crisis.



Key LBL priorities

- reducing the number of households in unsuitable and costly temporary accommodation
- reducing under occupation and severe overcrowding
- supporting move-on for single vulnerable households, from supported and semi-independent accommodation to independence
- supporting the regeneration of designated housing estates

Key challenges

- Demand vs supply
- Declining lets – almost halved since 2010/11
- Lack of supply causing more and more severe need
- Social stock becoming available not necessarily that which is most in demand

Bedroom	Let in 19/20	Number on the register in housing need
1 bedroom	624	1694
2 bedroom	305	3814
3 bedroom	171	2980
4 bedroom	27	986
5 bedroom	1	363

Proposed changes to the policy



Summary of proposed changes

- **Review the banding structure**
 - Band 1: Emergency
 - Band 2: Urgent/High
 - Band 3: Medium
 - Band 4: Low
- **Two new rehousing reasons added at high priority band 2:**
 - homelessness with urgent need
 - overcrowded by 3 bed
- **A new Band 4: Overcrowded by 1 bed (48% of the register)**
- **Increase overall lets**
- **Reducing the number of refusals**
- **Increase the number bids per week**

Review the banding structure

Housing Register at October 2020

	Total
Band 1	
Decant	40
Leaving Care	45
Freeing up a unit	441
All other Band 1	39
Band 2	
Overcrowded by 2 bed	559
Supported Housing Move On	52
Medical High	476
All other Band 2	33
Band 3	
Overcrowded By 1 Bed	4612
Homeless	2212
Medical Low	892
All other Band 3	458
Total	9859

Proposed Housing Register

	Total	Comment
Band 1		
Decant	40	
Leaving Care	45	
Freeing up a unit	441	
All other Band 1	39	
Band 2		
Overcrowded by 3 bed	160	This is a new category
Homeless – with high priority / urgent need	350	Estimate. This is a split of the old band 3 homelessness category
Supported Housing Move On	52	
Medical High	476	
All other Band 2	16	
Band 3		
Overcrowded By 2 Bed	399	This has been moved from band 2
Homeless	1862	
Medical Low	892	
All other Band 3	475	Management Discretion 2 has been added to this
Band 4		
Overcrowded by 1 Bed	4612	This has been moved from band 3
Total	9859	



New rehousing reasons: homeless with high priority

- All homeless households are currently in Band 3. After overcrowded by 1 bed, this is the largest cohort on our waiting list – 2180 households
- With social housing in such scarce supply, the PRS is critical to support people to move out of TA. Social housing needs to be prioritized to those in most need.
- Our proposal is to create a new primary rehousing reason, to give higher priority to homeless households who more urgently require social housing in Lewisham.
- We propose:
 - to link to our Private Rented Sector Offer policy: those for whom the PRS is assessed as not appropriate
 - And to link to our locational priority policy, which is used to assess accepted homeless households for their need to be placed in or out of borough
 - We are seeking views on any other or additional approach



New rehousing reason: a new severely overcrowded priority

- We know that we have some households who are severely overcrowded and we need to ensure those in the very worst conditions are prioritised for scarce large houses.
- We estimate there are about **160** of families over crowded by 3 or more bedrooms who are in need of 4 and 5 bed properties.
- There is an option to only include households with children (or adult dependents) in this new band . All others (households with adult non-dependent children) would remain in band 3 with overcrowded by 2 bed households.



A new band 4: Overcrowded by 1 bed

- Overcrowding by 1 bed is our largest category – 48% of the register.
- At the moment overcrowded by 1 bed is in the same band as statutory homeless.
- We would like to create a new band 4 to include overcrowded by 1 bed.
- However, it is unlikely that these households will be successful in a move due to the high numbers in this category, and their low priority.
- We recognise that this will be a difficult change for many people on the register.



Increase overall lets

- We have provision in the policy already to instigate ‘chain lets’.
- We are proposing adding a new element to increase overall lets.
- We propose ring-fencing a proportion of our first let properties to a transfer applicant, and we made sure that the resulting void is ringfenced to someone living in the PRS / TA. For each property, we could solve the needs of two households, whilst also maintaining equitable access to the available lets.
- Aside from building new homes, this is the only way we can solve more housing need with the resources we have.
- 1000 properties can create over 1200 lets if a minimum of 20% are ring-fenced . We could solve housing needs for 200 more households.
- First let tenants would need to fulfil certain criteria such as no rent arrears or NOSP served, and property that is move-in ready.



Reducing the number of refusals

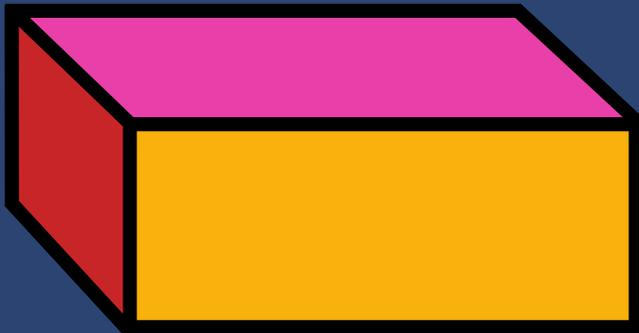
- A number of households – predominantly transferring tenants – are able to refuse up to 3 properties before they are penalised.
- We propose reducing this to 2 refusals because:
 - Social housing is scarce and we need to let it efficiently
 - Reducing would be less administratively burdensome
- The ‘one offer’ policy for homeless households would remain.



Increasing the number of bids per week

- We propose increasing the number of bids an applicant can make so that they can bid for multiple properties per week.
- This is beneficial for applicants as they will be able to express preference for more than one property and not be constrained by the system.
- This proposal will only be implemented if the system is operationally deliverable.

Consultation



Consultation to date

- 446 responses received by 26th January 2021, as follows:

Housing Status	Number of respondents	% of all respondents
I am currently staying with family for free	13	3%
I am in supported housing	6	1%
I am in temporary accommodation	118	26%
I do not currently have a fixed address	1	0%
I live in a care facility	1	0%
I own my home with a mortgage	23	5%
I own my home without a mortgage	7	2%
I rent my home privately	50	11%
I rent my home through a housing association or other social housing provider	146	33%
Prefer not to say/Blank	81	18%
Total	446	



Consultation plan

- Key comms activity to date has included:
 - Flash messaging on Homesearch website and Housing webpages
 - Emails to Housing Register applicants and text messages to TA and hostel residents
 - Emails to organisations supporting hard to reach groups
 - Weekly social media posts
 - Messaging to RPs, TRAs and TMOs
 - E-newsletter features to Lewisham residents
 - Raising awareness at key meetings with RPs, Supported Housing Forum, Homelessness Forum and Homesearch Partners Group
 - Internal comms and messaging to Members and key Housing Service officers



Equalities analysis of respondents to date

- The protected characteristics data for consultation respondents is being frequently analysed. We also compare to the main applicant data for Lewisham's Homeless Acceptances since 2018, and data for the wider Lewisham population, to identify any opportunities for further engagement.
- As at 26th January, the following has been noted:
 - Ethnicity: When making comparisons with homelessness acceptances, we have identified opportunities for closer working with Black African, Chinese, Indian and Bangladeshi communities. Consultation response representation from BAME groups is higher than for Lewisham's population overall.
 - Sex: Consultation respondents identifying as female compare almost exactly aligned to homelessness acceptances. Responses from females are significantly higher than Lewisham's population.
 - Sexual orientation and Disability: Homelessness acceptance data is mostly unavailable as responses are not mandatory. Consultation responses are comparable to Lewisham's population.



Consultation plan

- Current activities include:
 - Proactive work with community organisations to facilitate specific sessions for hard to reach groups
 - Twice weekly monitoring of consultation responses to identify any gaps where more proactive engagement may be required
 - Continuing with promotion through key comms activities
- The consultation period has been extended by 4 weeks due to the challenges faced by the Coronavirus Pandemic
- An intensive period of activity will take place until the consultation closes on 14th March

Any questions?

