

Response to Key Questions

Item 4. Changes to the Housing Register and Letting Policy

Housing Needs

What has been put in place to provide housing advice and guidance to residents that no longer qualify for the register, and to those that face a long wait or that are unlikely to get housed?

During the development, consultation and implementation phases of the new Allocations Policy a package of support was agreed for those residents no longer eligible. This included:

- Personalised, dedicated housing advice and support.
- Help finding suitable privately rented accommodation.
- An enhanced mutual exchange offer to help households already in permanent social housing to find and agree a transfer to alternative accommodation.
- Dedicated downsizing support for households looking for a smaller home.
- Mutual Exchange events

Demand for these services from those who have been removed from the register has been limited which indicates that many of those households previously on the register may have had no realistic expectation of securing social housing or may have found alternative solutions but remained on the register as a back up.

An example of what can be achieved if a tenant is willing to consider alternative housing happened shortly after the Housing register changes- Ms C, a Council Tenant, was living in a two bedroom, overcrowded property, needing two additional bedrooms. The tenant contacted the Benefits and Housing needs Service to see if we could help. We gave advice on affordability, suitability and information on how to find a privately rented property if she wished to prioritise this over her security of tenure. The tenant found a four bedroom privately rented semi detached house in Waltham Forest. We negotiated the rent down from £1875 to £1800 pcm which is above the Local Housing Allowance rate of £1725 pcm. The tenant is working and can afford the excess rent therefore we paid a landlord incentive of £3500 to help secure the property for the tenant and she released her Council property back to the Council for re-let.

There has been some interest in Mutual Exchange with residents supported in

	<p>applying for schemes however for those residents seeking larger accommodation there is limited opportunity in borough.</p>
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	<p>For those residents who are interested in downsizing from family accommodation, we have found that whilst there is no lack of demand, there is a lack of supply of the type of property that these residents will consider in the right location. Often the tenant will only consider a ground floor property with a garden in a very specific location, which either means that suitable properties do not exist or are utilised by those who have disabilities and need wheelchair accessible properties. It is not the case that the Council can simply facilitate swap moves between these tenants as their specific requirements outweigh their desire to move.</p>
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We will revisit this in light of increasing fuel bills and cost of living crisis, as this may cause some tenants to re-think their property requirements due to increased expenditure. This will link to the behavioural insights review we have carried out to help us better understand the potential barriers to considering moving (the write up and suggestions for follow on work can be found attached below: *Under Occupation Scheme - Insights Summary*).

How is resident voice and experience used to shape the service and how effective has this been in improving outcomes?

Whilst it is rather too early to demonstrate meaningful outcomes from the change to the Allocations Policy the service does not underestimate the value of residents' experiences of service delivery.

In delivering the new IT system the online form and application process has been developed using small groups of residents trialling iterations of the form. (See cyber attack below)

With a dedicated complaints team the service is able to monitor trends and to deliver service improvement regarding processes and messaging.

Recent presentations have been made to Advice Partners to share resident experiences and challenges and to encourage focus on achievable outcomes with clients.

Benefits and Housing Needs Service is funding a content designer post to work with the behavioural insights officer, to review all existing web site information to better inform residents on the availability of social housing and alternative options and to deliver a more client oriented content and messaging.

The service is also working to develop further support and information for residents, advocacy groups and colleagues in other Council services to help them understand the full range of options available. This includes case studies of residents who've successfully found better housing by exploring alternative options (including private rented options and out of borough moves) to long waits on the housing register.

What impact has the policy had on prioritising residents in the greatest need and providing more predictable outcomes?

The new allocations policy was intended to deliver a simpler and more equitable process to allocate social housing based on needs and circumstances. It can not, however, reduce waiting times as those are determined by available supply of housing - which continues to be extremely limited as a result of the housing crisis in Hackney.

There should be a clarity of purpose and delivery of the allocations policy such that residents have faith that the process is fair and transparent.

Whilst early in the delivery of the new scheme it is clear that residents with similar circumstances have the same opportunities as other residents no matter what the cause of their housing need.

This is particularly the case for applicants for whom the authority has accepted a statutory homelessness duty. In the past these residents would have been lower priority than those residents who had accommodation but qualified for the urgent band and would regularly see these urgent band applicants with much later band dates housed ahead of them.

The new scheme delivers more predictable outcomes as the majority join the register in Band B and will always have priority over residents with similar circumstances who joined the list at a later date.

Once the work to process the backlog of applications and changes caused by the cyber attack has been completed we will be able to give residents a new indication of their expected waiting time and the number of applicants ahead of them. With this information we will be able to have more open conversations with residents about their housing situation and what might be achieved more quickly to resolve immediate issues.

This is already being built into conversations with residents who approach the service as homeless or at risk of homelessness and through residents' interactions with neighbourhood housing officers. For applicants approaching medical needs we work

	<p>with colleagues in Social Services to explore other solutions that can be delivered in their existing accommodation.</p>
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	<p>For those families with disabled children in particularly difficult circumstances, Children's Social Care, Housing Management and Benefits and Housing Needs Service operate a senior level multi disciplinary team meeting on a monthly basis to ensure that the appropriate attention and support is provided.</p>
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