

Appendix 2 - Recommended Amendments

(Feedback results, relevant statistics and other information are shown in the boxes)

1. Financial assessment qualification criteria are retained and applicants with assets or incomes above the threshold levels for their household size do not qualify.

The figures are based on the current average cost of purchasing or renting a property in the Thurrock area with housing costs estimated as a third of income.

2. New financial threshold figures are adopted

An assessment of the costs of renting and purchasing different property types was undertaken in September 2014.

The new thresholds are shown in comparison with the previous thresholds – all figures are net of tax and national insurance

NB: Average wage in the Thurrock area (excluding Orsett and Chafford Hundred) is £26,000 per annum (equivalent to approx. £19,500 net)

Property size - according to household make-up	Net annual income required	
	Previous	New
Bedsit or room in shared house (single under 25 years old)	£18,000	£18,000
1 Bedroom (single over 25 or couple)	£22,000	£24,500
2 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus child/ren)	£27,000	£30,000
3 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus children)	£32,000	£40,000
4 Bedrooms (Single/couple plus children)	£40,000	£53,500
Sheltered Housing (includes sum for long term service charges)	£145,000	£158,000
Extra Care Housing (includes sum for long term service charges)	£213,000	£225,000

3. No changes made to the Local Connection and Behaviour qualification criteria.

Feedback from all those consulted suggested that these criteria were working well and should be maintained.

4. Maintain the 25% proportion of properties let only to transferring tenants

- Year to date 23.6% achieved
- 86% online feedback agreed with the 25% proportion
- Members felt it was working well and for officers to decide on the exact figure based on their working knowledge
- Staff & agencies felt it was generally about right and that the number of complaints from transfer applicants had decreased noticeably

5. The number of properties let only to working households is revised to a maximum of 15%. This will allow officers the discretion to match the number of properties more closely to the number of eligible applicants.

- Year to date 11% achieved and 12% of housing applicants eligible
- 86% online feedback agreed with the figure of 15%
- Member's agreed the percentage seems right and that it is a good incentive for applicants to work
- Staff & agencies felt it was good to recognise Working households but that more advertising of the Working Household priority was needed

6. Continue with the recycling of adapted properties but with the following additions:

i) when properties are initially only advertised for people that need the adaptations, there should be more flexibility around the requirements so that where applicants did not require the exact adaptations they might still be offered adapted properties.

ii) when there are no suitable applicants requiring the adaptations and the property is let to someone who does not require the adaptations it should be on the understanding that any adaptations made would not be removed. For example: if a property is let with a walk in shower, it would not be replaced by a bath after the property was let. Prospective tenants would be made aware of this before they signed their tenancy agreement.

- Year to date 4% properties were advertised but only 1% of the housing list qualified
- 86% online feedback agreed with the figure
- Members felt that it was good to recycle properties but they would like flexibility and discretion used on applicants who haven't been assessed as requiring the specific adaptations but their medical needs show they require an adaptation

7. Continue to restrict the number of times an applicant can bid for, and refuse a property, to 3 where there is no priority band. After 3 refusals the application is cancelled. Any bid that is active on the system at the end of the bidding cycle, would be counted

- This only applies to those bidding without a priority band
- 77% online feedback agreed that 3 refusals are too many
- Members felt that 3 refusals was a fair number but that once the bidding had closed a bid must count
- The majority of officers & agencies felt that 3 refusals were too generous

8. Applicants with a priority banding continue to receive only one suitable offer with an exception for applicants who are downsizing who would have up to three offers. Any bid that is active on the system at the end of the bidding cycle, would be counted

- This only applies to those bidding with a priority band
- 77% online feedback agreed that 3 refusals are too many
- Members felt that once the bidding had closed a bid must count
- The majority of officers & agencies felt that it was too easy for applicants to bid and refuse properties.

9. Direct and sensitive offers to continue for specific priority groups, and at the discretion of the Councils' Housing Management panel. Managers to have discretion over the actual percentage achieved each year.

- The current scheme allows up to 10% of direct offers to be made
- Year to date 8% direct offers had been made
- Members felt 10% was a fair number, however officers needed to be able to determine direct offers as required
- Officers and agencies felt direct offers are utilised well for Homeless applicants & Management Panel decisions and that 10% is fair
- Further analysis of direct offers to be considered by Senior management

10. Priorities and concessions for the armed forces to continue

- There are provisions within the policy for awarding extra priority to this group which meet statutory guidance
- There are also local provisions including backdating of applications and disregarding financial awards for the financial qualification assessment
- 91% online feedback agreed with the current provisions
- All Members and the majority of officers and agencies felt these were good provisions

11. Time limits for priority bidding to remain the same but introduce an exception for applicants who are downsizing and in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) because of a shortfall in benefit due to under occupation. For these

applicants the bidding priority should be reviewed at 6 months in line with the review period for the DHP.

- The current scheme allows 12 months bidding time for priority applicants – with exceptions for the homeless & those in housing with hazards due to the urgency of their circumstances
- Limited stats show that people are waiting longer to be housed out of choice
- 77% online feedback agreed the time limit should be reduced
- Members wanted to retain the limit but review again when there were more stats available
- Officers and agencies felt there could be other factors and that all cases should be reviewed at 6 months

12. Downsizing financial incentives are retained but the amount paid to be reviewed regularly and agreed by senior management.

- Current provisions allow for an incentive payment to be made and priority banding awarded
- The current financial incentive is £1000 per bedroom vacated
- 32% online feedback agreed the current payment incentive was too generous
- Members stated that £1000 per bedroom was a fair incentive but that it should be paid to tenants moving into Extra Care and Registered Providers properties. However, the cost implication of this needs to be explored beforehand.

Further recommendations

The review of the scheme allows further additions and clarifications to be added. It is recommended that the following additions are made:

13. A generic provision be added to allow local lettings policies to be applied

- A local lettings plan allows priority for properties in a certain area to certain groups outside of the usual reasonable preference groups: for example where there is a village environment with very low numbers of social housing, priority can be awarded to people with a local connection to that village or where people are moved out of an area for redevelopment a lettings plan would allow those people priority to move back to the area once the redevelopment is completed
- The plans would be specific for each individual site
- A local lettings plan is permitted so long as the plan does not dominate the allocations scheme
- There is currently no provision within the Allocations Scheme for local lettings plans

14. Properties may be identified for use as supported housing. For example to assist social care services with the decanting of people from unnecessary residential care, into supported accommodation.

- The July Housing Overview & Scrutiny panel decision to decommission some sheltered properties will free up properties which may be suitable for supported housing
- There is a provision in the housing allocations scheme to use ex-warden properties as direct offers for applicants - this could be expanded

15. Mutual exchanges are only agreed where the incoming tenant's household meets the bedroom requirements in line with the Council's bedroom standard so that there are no bedrooms being under-occupied

- The current practice allows an under-occupation by one bedroom for mutually exchanging tenants
- Housing benefit will not be paid on properties that are under occupied