

ELIGIBILITY TO JOIN THE HOUSING REGISTER

We are proposing to make an amendment to the 'local connection' qualifying criteria. The current local connection qualifying criteria states:

"Qualifying households will:

- have been resident in West Berkshire for 6 months out of the last 12 months OR they have been resident in West Berkshire for 3 years out of the last five OR they have a parent or sibling who has lived in West Berkshire for 6 months out of the last 12 months OR they have a parent or sibling who has lived in West Berkshire for 3 years out of the last 5 year OR they have been employed in meaningful paid employment within the district, for 16 hours or more a week, for at least the last 6 months"

We are proposing that this should be changed to the following:

"Subject to being eligible for an offer of accommodation (see Section 8 above), an applicant will qualify for the CHR if they, *or an adult member of their household*:

- have been resident in West Berkshire *for at least 2 consecutive years immediately prior to their application being made* OR they have a parent or adult sibling or adult child who has lived in West Berkshire for 5 consecutive years OR they have been employed in meaningful paid employment within the district, *for 16 hours or more a week, for at least the last 2 consecutive years . The local connection criteria must be maintained for the duration of the application*".

The other two qualifying criteria would remain unchanged.

The rural exception site cascade has also been amended to reflect the proposed new qualifying criteria.

Why are we making this proposal?

West Berkshire Council introduced local connection qualifying criteria in 2013. The Government has published guidance which

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states that “*The Secretary of State believes that including a residency requirement is appropriate and strongly encourages all housing authorities to adopt such an approach. The Secretary of State believes that a reasonable period of residency would be at least two years*”.

We are therefore proposing to adapt our local connection qualifying criteria to reflect the ‘reasonable period’ set out by the Secretary of State.

Do you agree with this proposal?

- The residence criteria do not take account of residents in shorthold tenancies who may have moved for short periods across the border into other LA areas, such as Reading or Hampshire, and then moved back. The parent/sibling/child criteria do not specify when the 5 consecutive years needs to have been (e.g. immediately prior to the application being made)
- Priority should be given to people who have lived and worked in Newbury all their lives.
- Truthfully, the people in government of the state do not seriously live around ordinary people who either are (very poor or ill health or a lone). These people(in brackets) really struggle to get the important resources they need to live, eg, hospitals,doctors,food shops, positive communities. Serious knowledge/experiences people who understand and live in conditions need to be involved in discussions to help.
- Don't think its fair how people who are not working or have no intentions of working seem to get more help than people who are working hard to provide a good life for their families. I have been registered for over a year and have worked since I was 16. My daughter goes to nursery while I study and work part time (24 hours) and I don't seem to be even prioritised!!
- I have always supported one county one family. Every resident should have the freedom to choose to live anywhere within Berkshire.
- Not sure if I agree or not. Although I match the criteria now when I arrived back to this country I did not and was quite desperate to find housing for myself and my children. The district I spent the first 30 years of my living and working life in, the only place I had ever lived in this country told me I had no local connection and told me they could not help me. I felt totally lost because my father had moved to an area of London that was not right for my kids and in my mind I had no connection with only my Fathers residency. Therefore I feel in some circumstances the local connection is questionable when people need help.

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- I have lived in west berks for over 20 years and people that don't have the need for housing seem to get put straight to the top of the list
- It all looks straight forward and looks fair
- Although I meet the old AND new criteria's I still cannot get housing even though I am a one parent family
- Have a parent, adult siblings and adult child living in west Berkshire, but we have been wiped off all our previous points for no reason as to the new proposal.
- Through various circumstances people may have had to leave their 'local' area leaving their children/parents there. Especially when one ages, one should be able to move back to their local town/area if their children or parents are still resident there and have been for the past 5 years. This is fair to people who have lived in the area prior to a move and who still have local family connections.
- This is taking up homes for people that were born and bred in west Berkshire and it wouldn't be fair to allow people that have been here hardly any time at all.
- I was informed I don't qualify to be re housed I work in Berkshire have done 5 years
- Your be letting people in that don't NEED to be in west Berkshire when I have been born and bred here I just want to continue living here when I'm being priced out my home land
- I think it is reasonable.
- As a zero hours employee it would affect my suitability to live within the area although I am employed within the area. I also have a sibling who lives within the area but I believe she may have not been resident within the area for 4 years. Both these criteria may affect my application.
- People that have full connection to their home town should have the chance of housing. Not just anyone.
- Far to many immigrants coming to the uk & getting housing & benefits straight away! 2 years is a great idea! Will give the people who deserve a property & have lived in the uk all their life a good chance.
- I think this fair
- This is a much better proposal and makes people need to be here for a while rather than and getting housed straight away
- I think this is a way for the council to house more immigrants over people's children who have lived here all their lives

EXCEPTIONS TO LOCAL CONNECTION QUALIFYING CRITERIA TO ENCOURAGE LABOUR MOBILITY FOR CURRENT SOCIAL TENANTS

The Housing Allocations Policy currently makes exceptions to local connection qualifying criteria for some households who fall within the following groups: armed services personnel; fleeing domestic abuse or violence; witness protection; looked after children; and homeless households.

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We are proposing to add a further group to this list as follows:

“An exception to the local connection criteria will be made where a current social tenant wishes to move to take up a job or to be closer to their work and:

~ they have a permanent contract for 16 or more hours each week

~ their place of work (not the head office) is within the district of West

Berkshire

~the travelling time if they do not move will exceed one and a half hours or more each way by a route and means of travel that is appropriate to their circumstances or circumstances of employment (based on current DWP guidance)

~ the travelling time is unreasonable because of the applicant’s health or their caring responsibilities.

Social tenants are encouraged to pursue mutual exchange or landlord transfer as a means of meeting their relocation needs as they may encounter a lengthy wait for accommodation through the Common Housing Register”.

Why are we making this proposal?

The Government has published statutory guidance that states “we expect housing authorities to make appropriate exceptions to their residency test for social tenants so as not to impede labour market mobility”.

Do you agree with this proposal?

- If you would like to say why you gave us this answer, please tell us below:
- Min 39 hours, as in full time work
- This needs thought, jobs and travel go together these days, surviving making ends meet - money, work, travel. Shortage of homes, difficult choices, housing, schools. Needs positive balance, honest answers, care of wellbeing. Equality towards all tenants, no rushed applications from housing - agents who just care about the rent to be paid! Serious thinking.
- This follows on to my last answer.
- There used to be a 'key worker' clause which would cover all teachers, social workers, medical staff and such. I believe the 'key worker' clause should still be implemented but VERY careful consideration must only be given to those working in the local area who can show they are reliable employees and will endeavour to stay in local employment for a certain amount

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of time. Otherwise you will have all and sundry applying for housing in Newbury such as builders, shop workers, casual workers etc who may not stay in the town ordinarily but who will take housing away from genuine local people.

- Priority should be given to the already housed tenants as they clearly need to move into larger or smaller accommodation and by them moving on or around frees up the next property for a new tenant
- Because I currently fall within the group that needs a move to be able to take up employment, having been jobless since my position as a carer ended with the passing of my mother, and living in a remote location with a bus every two hours whilst I cannot drive has not made me desirable to employers.
- If the residents that are already housed and need moving into larger/smaller homes it will help the CHR move on and round as it will free up homes quicker than home swapper
- What about big issue sellers they can work any hours to get benefit
- Although they should try mutual exchange or private lets first

FOSTER CARERS

The Housing Allocations Policy sets out guidelines for the size of property that households will be entitled to based on their current household make-up. Foster children usually require their own room, regardless of their age, but the Housing Allocations Policy makes no allowance for this.

We are proposing to amend the bedroom allocation criteria for foster carers as follows:

“The council recognises the contribution that foster carers make towards ensuring that children in West Berkshire are cared for. For this reason, one additional bedroom can be awarded to those applicants approved to foster and where recommendation is made by Social Services to provide accommodation because the current accommodation is not large enough or would cause overcrowding. A check will be made with the Family Placement team prior to allocation to ensure that the applicant is still an approved foster carer.

Housing Benefit Regulations allow approved foster carers an extra bedroom for use by a foster child or children under the size criteria rules where:

- ~ *Approved foster carers have a child placed with them*
- ~ *Approved foster carers who are between placements but only for a period of up to 52 consecutive weeks from the date of the last placement*
- ~ *Newly approved foster carers but only for a period of up to 52 consecutive weeks from the date of the approval, if no child is placed*

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with them during that period.

A decision to award an additional bedroom to approved foster carers for the purposes of the CHR is not an indication that Housing Benefit will be paid.

Applicants will therefore need to ensure that they are able to meet any potential rental shortfall if they do not fall into one of the above categories or cease to be an approved foster carer”.

Why are we making this proposal?

The Council has a role as a ‘Corporate Parent’ and is responsible for looked after children. The amendment to the policy will support the excellent work that foster carers carry out supporting and providing for children who need to be looked after.

Do you agree with this proposal?

- If you would like to say why you gave this answer, or make suggestions on what you feel is the sufficient income level please tell us below:
- I believe that our country is seriously in need of care, children are our future, a secure loving home and positive up-bringing for the children hopefully will provide a better world to come. Its time adults need to ensure and practice caring homes that are positive, positive outcomes.
- Sufficient income level .say from 20 000 pounds a year
- In recent times i.e. "Rotherham" we don't know if children are looked after
- Foster carers are paid a substantial amount of money to care for their temporary family members and many are adults whose children have now flown the nest. If a foster parent who is living in social housing needs another room to accommodate another child, the best remedy would be to have a housing exchange department who would cater for these people. Giving foster parents larger houses for children who may or may not arrive is not financially or socially responsible. Most foster parent applicants do apply because they have a spare room already. The number of fosterers would rise if the carrot for a larger home was dangled, in my opinion.
- But I would worry that not enough regular checks have been made and it will lead to people sitting on large family homes when they do not need the home. or will force them to move on again should fostering cease
- I feel there could be bedroom tax issues or people sitting on bigger homes for a long time and getting away with it when other people really need it

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- I am a single mum who cannot get help. Foster carers should be able to home the child if going ahead with it.
- As long as it can be proven.
- Foster careers do a great job, but the question differs back too, if they decide in the long run that fostering isn't for them? Will they still be eligible to stay in that properly with spare bedrooms?
- Lots of families suffer from overcrowding why should a foster carer be any different just because the child is not their own. This is unfair to others
- We care for are grandson who is in care but live in a ***** ***** ***** ***** people so no child interaction we applied but we're told we had to sell are home and pay private landlords this is wrong we saved to help our children not some person with more than they will have

HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

The homelessness process and the housing register are two very distinct processes. Not all homeless households, will receive an offer of accommodation through the Common Housing Register and for many, the private rented sector will be best placed to meet their needs. Regardless of the final offer, the Council needs to ensure that homeless households are able to effectively manage and sustain a tenancy prior to making an offer of accommodation, to ensure that households do not fall into a cycle of repeat homelessness.

We are proposing to amend the Housing Allocations Policy relating to homeless households as follows:

“Applicants to whom a full housing duty has been accepted and who are placed in temporary accommodation will have their CHR application deferred for a minimum of 4 months. This is to allow the Housing Service time to identify any ongoing support needs and to confirm that the applicant is able to effectively manage and sustain a tenancy prior to being offered settled accommodation.

The Housing Service will review the deferral after four months but may extend this period if the tenancy is not being satisfactorily maintained. Applicants in temporary accommodation who have had notice served on them, either for rent arrears or for breach of tenancy agreement will remain deferred until such time as the notice expires or the breaches/rent arrears are remedied/cleared”.

Why are we making this proposal?

Many households to whom a full housing duty is owed have never held their own tenancy or have experienced issues, for

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example, breaches of tenancy or rent arrears, during previous tenancies that they have held. Deferring a homeless household's application for a minimum period of four months will allow the Council to identify ongoing support needs and confirm that an applicant is able to manage and sustain a tenancy. This will mean that homeless households will not be moved on before they are ready and will reduce the number of households that fall into a cycle of repeat homelessness.

Do you agree with this proposal?

- It's important that humans don't live in squalor, that we keep our homes respectable. People are really struggling to make ends meet, choice = food or bills. Working or none working people, the government don't really care, housing agents try their best, while the government eat and live well, ordinary people die or suffer everyday trying to live, pay rent, keep a home, to keep them from being homeless.
- I agree with the principle of this proposal, however the four month deferral period should be longer, as the WBC Allocations Policy gives overriding priority to homeless households which in my opinion encourages people to take this route in order to secure social housing very quickly. As a result, many hard working households living in the private sector are not given the necessary priority to secure more affordable social housing.
- I firmly believe this will get me housed quicker and efficiently
- This is an excellent proposal. Many long term homeless persons are unable to care for themselves and may find it difficult to take on the responsibility of a tenancy without adequate 'home team' guidance and support.
- 4 months is an extremely long time for someone that is in temporary accommodation what if you were sharing a room with two children in the middle of nowhere away from school, work and family 4 months is a very long time. each case needs to be individually assessed rather than tarring all homeless people with the same brush - every case is different
- The house I currently rent was up for sale, I was being made homeless and 8 months pregnant I contacted west berks for help and they did NOTHING!. I would have to be homeless and living in my car before they could do anything, I even said "what do I have more chance of flying to the moon, her reply YES!. I left school at 15 and have worked since then! Never claimed benefits. but it seems the council does not want to help working people like myself who pay in to the system's would be very much interested on your opinion on this thank you
- but I fear this could affect homeless people who need a home and need to move the last thing they need is their account being frozen 4 months is a long time in a studio flat sharing a bed with an 8 year old miles away from school/work for instance
- If you have children I think 4 months would be a little unsettling for the children if in a B&B & away from the area. for single people it wouldn't & shouldn't cause a problem.

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- I think the money spent housing young girls in private houses is ridiculous I no one whose rent was 900 a month there are so many buildings empty that could home men who are homeless they're the ones who need help just because they can't get pregnant to get a property

OTHER AMENDMENTS

We are proposing a number of other minor amendments. These are primarily to offer clarification on the Housing Allocations Policy, to remove inconsistencies and to reflect current operational practices and terminology. These amendments affect the following:

- Sanctions
- Rural Exception Site cascade mechanism
- Overcrowding
- Lacking and sharing needs assessment
- False or misleading information and fraud prevention
- Cancelling, Suspending & Deferring Applications
- Assisted bidding
- Bypassing applicants
- Assessment of bids
- Glossary

Having read the proposed amendments Housing Allocations Policy, are there any other comments that you wish to make?

- 7.5.1: very welcome 7.5.6: supported - what form of evidence would the RP be expected to supply? 7.6.6: welcome 16.7-9: welcome provided that is linked to DHP 21.4 & 5: very welcome & could link with financial & other capacity building work with household 30.4: very welcome
- Can any housing association provide 100%? Governments give out new rules, housing agents work hard to comply to them, considering seriously a care of needs and wellbeing to all tenants 1st priority.
- I have read all through the proposed policies which I have agreed on all, but there isn't anything I would like to add thank you.
- Greater clarification is needed to these proposed changes.
- Why should those people without a job take priority on the housing needs than someone who works hard but can't afford for all their salary to be spent on accommodation?!?!?

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- There is no help or guidance for those that are disabled, the housing teams collaborate amongst themselves and hold personal grudges against individuals - I am relating to *****, *****, ***** and *****.
- Some of the proposals are good in a way but the proposal that anyone with parents, siblings and children in West Berkshire are able to gain a house through you deems to be wrong in our eyes. It seems this has not been the case for me and my family. We have been on the housing register for 10+ years and we have now had all of our previous points wiped due to these new proposals and aren't being offered any properties regardless of bidding most weeks.
- Assessment of bids
- I think that we should get more help with medical as I don't feel that we are getting all the point and help needed
- I have just completed this survey and wrote in this box on the last one but didn't realise they are anonymous so I didn't put my name, I was saying that I had my points taken off last year and my rent is £850 a month, just wanted to clarify who i am. *****. If you could get back to me I would be very grateful. Many Thanks
- I would like to know why all my points were removed last year and why I got taken off the list, I understand we are in privately rented accommodation and according to you we can afford the rent of £850 every month but that is all we can afford, we have hardly anything left out of our wages after the bills have gone out. It took me a long time to build those points up and I had some hope of getting a social house and actually being able to afford to live rather than all our money going on rent. I just think it is totally unfair. My understanding of this survey is that I can go back on the list but how can you take away all my points last year and expect me to start right from scratch again when in a couple of years time I would of had enough points to get a property. It is putting so much stress and pressure on our family life with having so much rent and bills to pay, I was better off on benefits than i am now with me and my partner working, it's ridiculous. I would be grateful if you could re look at this and my situation. Many Thanks
- The local council must be committed to local housing applicants or those with a local connection before considering those who have migrated into the area. A team of housing assistants, house to house callers who assist those with social difficulties that may fall into arrears is needed (and you may well already have such), and during the 4 months deferred period those waiting for housing should agree to undergo some 'living in your own home' training such as how to pay bills, rent and buy food - how to clean and take pride in their homes etc. Otherwise, I am aware of how West Berkshire Council has successfully supported many local people by working with Sovereign Housing Association and others by allocating a high standard of properties.
- Points awarded for not having a garden are silly now considering most homes now are flats and don't have this luxury and most people don't actually want one. the option should be asked on the form if they want a garden I hate seeing people with gardens that are over grown and unloved by tenants when I'm stuck in a flat and would really love a garden. also pets should be more of an option on the form as pet owners require gardens but proof of dog owner ship for say 18 months

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should be given otherwise people will just get pets.

- I think that by and large the majority of the changes make sense in the current financial and employment crisis that we find ourselves in. However I was surprised that foster children regardless of age were not allocated a bedroom to themselves already.
- My policy was deferred my points went down to zero
- Yes but makes no difference for me as I have no chance at all in getting a council house. They must be saved for special people
- I need house please .I don't have anywhere to live!!!
- I think reviews need to be made on gardens, or whether the person on the CHR wants a garden not giving those points because they don't have one. It's very frustrating to drive/bus past people's homes with extremely un kept gardens of families who have been given them when they clearly don't deserve or want the garden. Priority to pet owners also (if they can prove they have owned the pet for longer than 18months) pets make up a lot of families be that old or young and they have proven to be some of the best tenants they are stable and content.
- I found it very interesting
- Work all my life finished work to look after my 4 year old son 18 months ago now in shared accommodation due to landlord wanting back is house not good that people can jump the list from Europe
- Help people who are trying to help themselves. I am in a one bed without a garden with a child. I own the house but cannot rent it and put the rent towards a bigger one as its classed as an income. I cannot do rent and buy as I already own a home etc. My son and I are totally stuck and can do nothing to help ourselves as we are blocked at every avenue.
- I have been bypassed on 12 occasions due to my disability (I was not allowed any houses), but I am able to walk and fully mobile. Has this changed as I was told it had?
- I have been given a year's ban for possession of small quantity of class b drug and this despite my being on sick for having drug issues and this also despite a period of homelessness stretching over three years...not right
- I was nearly made homeless, not by any fault of my own. I use to rent a room and my circumstances changed a lot when my ex wife dumped my son on the door step. When I asked for help from the local council, I was surprised by the lack of help I received, as my son and I had to share 1room, a bedroom that was it, no other room. It was cramped and we had no space to ourselves it was a trying time. The best I was told was to rent privately, but having no money this was a challenge. I got myself sorted in the end, and everything worked out for us, I was allocated 25 points at the time, which is pretty pointless to win anything on the housing list... I believe the whole housing thing needs looking at.
- I think it's unfair. A friend of mine who lived in kersey crescent wasn't housed in time and was given a two bedroom house. Just him and his girlfriend. Yet me, my husband and son all live in a first story flat in one bedroom and have done now for

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ten months with no extra points yearly now it's impossible to be housed. The points stay the same and there is no way to get to the top of the priority list.

- I don't agree with any of this I have been on the register for a long time now and I'm still in the same place where I started
- After talking with family and my foster children that I am still in touch with I think no matter what anyone says the policy will be whatever the council decide
- Councils should always, if the tenant is claiming benefits pay the landlord directly thus avoiding arrears in rent for the tenant.
- I wish it was easier for families like us to secure a property. All we want is a place to call our own we want to feel secure and not worry about having to move etc and not being able to decorate etc. Been on the list now since 2007 only having ten points and my medical problems are caused mainly by worrying over housing etc.
- Yes. I have been waiting now for over 18months and I think the overcrowding issue is much needed as there are 7 of us in a three bedroom house which I don't feel us healthy for me and my 4 year old. One bathroom and too many distractions. I think that the new policy in place with regards to having lived in the. UK for a certain amount of time is great. As I'm all for people living in our country but we have allowed so many people in now that thus us now affecting people who were born here and not only that overcrowding in schools, docs etc .