

# West Berkshire Council Housing Allocations Service



## IMPORTANT NEWS FOR ALL HOUSING REGISTER

**The system of choice based lettings (CBL)** which allocates affordable housing to households who have applied through the Common Housing Register, has been in operation in West Berkshire since 2007.

There is a very high demand for a limited supply of affordable housing within West Berkshire. We need to ensure that we are making best use of this stock and allocating it to households who have the most need for it. To do this we are currently undertaking a full review of the Allocations Policy and the way that we administer the service.

As part of the review, we wish to understand the views of residents who may be affected by

the changes that we are proposing. This Newsletter provides you with an opportunity to comment on the key principles of the Allocations Policy that we are seeking to change. A more detailed consultation will be held in the future, on the full draft Allocations Policy.

**We are keen to hear your views so please complete the questionnaire attached and return it to us in the pre-paid envelope provided, or complete on line at [www.westberks/housingconsultation](http://www.westberks/housingconsultation). We will take account of your views as we draft the final version of the Policy**

### **Why are we reviewing the Housing Allocations Policy and improving the service to you:**

The Allocations Policy has not been reviewed since 2007. Given the high level of demand for affordable housing, we need to ensure that the limited homes that become available are allocated to households who are most in need of them. There have also been a number of national policy changes that the Council needs to consider in the drafting of the Allocations Policy.

### **What is the Benefit to you?**

We are hoping to draft a simpler, clearer policy so that applicants can easily see and understand the reasons for their assessed level of housing need.

*"we need to ensure that the limited homes that become available are allocated to households who are most in need of them"*



## The Aims of the Housing Allocations Service are:

- To help meet the housing needs of households across West Berkshire in the most effective way;
- To meet the statutory requirements of the West Berkshire Council within the current legislative framework;
- Work genuinely in partnership with partner housing providers;
- To give preference to those who have a local connection to West Berkshire;
- To provide and promote a quick, simple to use, customer-friendly lettings service for social housing vacancies;
- To investigate opportunities to maximise efficiencies in the provision of the service.

<p><b>Policy criteria:</b></p> <p><b>Eligibility</b></p>	<p><b>Proposed Change:</b></p> <p>To extend the locally tested eligibility criteria for people who do not qualify, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Those who owe money from the Threshold Loan Scheme and Rent Arrears Repayment Plan schedules</li> <li>● People who have been excluded for bad behaviour</li> <li>● People who have supplied false or misleading information on their application for housing.</li> </ul> <p>Households falling into these categories may not be accepted onto the Common Housing Register, or may be suspended for a period of time or may not be given preference for allocation of housing.</p>
<p><b>Open/Closed Register</b></p>	<p>The Council currently operates an open housing register which allows anyone, from anywhere in the country, to apply, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria.</p> <p>The Council is proposing moving to a closed housing register. In future, only people who have a defined local connection to West Berkshire, and who do not have adequate financial resources to secure accommodation in the private sector (whether rented, owned or part-owned), will be able to join the housing register.</p>
<p><b>Applicants owed a full Homelessness Duty</b></p>	<p>Limit or remove the period during which applicants can exercise choice and refuse offers without bringing Homelessness Duty to an end.</p> <p>Make provision for the Council to bid on suitable properties on behalf of the applicant as soon as a homelessness duty is accepted, in order to discharge that duty</p>

<b>Social Needs</b>	Make provision for Social Needs points to be awarded on a time limited basis or to have conditions attached. If conditions are not met, points may be removed.
<b>Financial Resources</b>	When local rents for a suitable property equates to 35% or less of household income, applicants may not be eligible for Social Housing.
<b>Bedroom Assessment</b>	Amend the Allocations Policy so that applicants are entitled to one bedroom for: Every adult couple (married or unmarried), any other adult aged 16+, any two children of the same sex aged 16 or under, any two children aged less than 10 years, any other child. This brings the policy in line with Housing Benefit regulations for private rented accommodation and addresses the proposed changes in Housing Benefit entitlement for social housing tenants who are 'under-occupying'.
<b>Health and Disability Assessment (Medical)</b>	Review the points assessment to allow one award of a set number of points instead of having a scale of points. This will still be applicable to each person in the household with a medical need.
<b>Transfers</b>	To bring the transfer scheme for existing social housing tenants into the Common Housing Register and to advertise homes for transfer applicants through Choice Based Lettings
<b>Under-occupancy</b>	To amend the housing needs assessment to give preference to households who are current social housing tenants in West Berkshire and who wish to move to smaller accommodation, freeing up family accommodation.
<b>Condition of Property</b>	Review the points assessment to allow one or two awards of a set number of points instead of having a scale of points. One award per application. Evidence of disrepair required.
<b>Bidding Cycle</b>	Offer a daily rather than weekly bidding cycle.





## What do I do next?

In order to inform us what you think about our reviewed Allocations Policy and how it might be improved, please either:

- Complete the attached **questionnaire**
- Complete the survey at **[www.westberks.com/housingconsultation](http://www.westberks.com/housingconsultation)**
- Give us a call on **01635 519214** to discuss. **Jayne Mills**, Project Manager for the review will be happy to talk with you.