



# TLC Report – Housing Allocations Policy Review

<b>Report contact</b>	<i>Taylor Burr</i>
<b>Background</b>	This report details the proposed changes that Strategic Housing would like to implement to the current Housing Allocations policy following a review carried out across the entire Housing Service. This takes in to consideration a number of keys areas raised since the last full policy review.
<b>Consultation</b> <i>(What consultation has taken place or is planned)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consultation has already taken place with different service areas in Housing.</li> <li>- Consultation with TLC</li> </ul>
<b>Attached documents</b>	The current Housing Allocations Policy
<b>Requested action from the TLC in order to complete commitment 2 from the Get Involved strategy.</b> <i>‘Dacorum Borough Council works in partnership to ensure the housing service is shaped by the needs of our tenants’ What would you like the outcome of your attendance at TLC to be?)</i>	Please provide any comments to the proposed changes and any suggestions that may benefit the new Housing Allocations Policy
<b>Next steps</b>	Following input from TLC, the report will be presented to the Member Engagement Session on Tuesday 8 <sup>th</sup> December.

2020



# Housing Allocations Policy Review

TAYLOR BURR

## Introduction

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, each local authority has the right to determine their own Housing Allocations Policy. This allows local authorities to give “reasonable preference” to certain categories of applicants, ensure that properties are allocated in a fair and reasonable manner as well as being able to better manage our stock. The Allocations Policy sets out the rules that Dacorum Borough Council must follow when letting our properties. This also allows us to manage the unrealistic expectations of those applicants who have little or no prospect of being allocated a property. It is a legal requirement that this policy should be reviewed every 4 years to take ensure the current policy evolves with the ever changing climate. This review takes in to consideration areas that have been identified through complaints, service requests, repeated issues applicants have had to face and areas that staff have highlighted for improvement.

### What is an Allocation?

Definition of an ‘allocation’ as defined in ‘Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England’:

A housing authority allocates accommodation when it:

- selects a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by that authority
- nominates a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of accommodation held by another housing authority
- nominates a person to be an assured tenant of accommodation held by a Private Registered Provider

### Dacorum’s Context

Dacorum Borough Council is one of the few stock holding local authorities in Hertfordshire. Currently, applicants are able to place a bid on suitable properties for their housing need, via the Choice Based Lettings scheme (CBL) on the website [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk). Other applicants are given a direct offer when their needs are high or they have received a positive homeless decision.

Currently we have 5882 active applicants registered for housing on our housing register. Of these active applicants, their need by size of accommodation required is show below:

Accommodation Requirement	Applicants
1 Bed	5124
2 Bed	1703
3 Bed	793
4 Bed	170
5 Bed	36
Unknown*	33

*\*Unknown figure represents applications that are suspended pending further information and an assessment of their household requirement has not yet taken place.*

Approximately 2500 of these active applicants have very low need, with no physical or mental impairments, overcrowding or other social/welfare issue. These households are in the current position of sharing accommodation with family members and looking to have their own home.

Additionally, there are 1978 applicants who have a suspended application, this can be for a number of reasons, but examples are: rent arrears, fraud investigation or other enquiry pending. These households still display some form of housing need.

A number of applicants require adapted accommodation to suit their specific need. Due to the varying degree of adaptations required, we allocate these properties via our direct offer list. There are approximately 50 households, with an Occupational Therapist report indicating a need for adapted accommodation. At present, a large volume of our stock does not lend itself to adaptations and this can often mean a lengthy wait until such accommodation can be identified.

Below is an example of the surrounding boroughs housing registers compared to their housing stock:

Local Authority	Housing Stock	Registered for housing
Dacorum	10,158	7859
St Albans	4898	651
Hatfield	9044	2610
Stevenage	7871	1970

Although we may hold the largest amount of housing stock, the ratio of eligible applicants to stock is the lowest when compared to the other authorities in the area.

## Challenges

The below sets out the biggest challenges Dacorum's Housing service would like to tackle when implementing the new policy.

### 1. Supported Housing

While we are trying to manage our general needs stock to ensure those most in need are prioritised, we have seen a decline of interest in our supported housing properties. Currently, with the demand for these properties being so low, we have seen an increase in void times. This means we have many properties that are empty for long periods of time. Empty properties mean we are not able to receive rent payments, resulting in a significant loss of income for the council. It also increases the risk of potential vandalism and break in's when the public realise the property has been unoccupied for a long period. It has led to Supported Housing properties being allocated to applicants under the age of 60 to ensure that properties are let.

In total there are 1136 applicants aged over 60 on the register, with 823 of these applicants being active. Of these 823 applicants, only 675 have indicated that they would be interested in accessing supported accommodation. This does not mean that they are the only households who wish to access such accommodation, but they are the only applicants who have explicitly confirmed this. An additional 132 applicants aged 50-59 have also registered an interest in supported accommodation.

In total, we hold 1906 supported properties. This can be broken down in to two categories

**Category 1** – 691 – Dispersed properties in the community such as bungalows

**Category 2** – 1215 – Usually properties within a scheme.

It has been identified that a number of applicants trying to access these properties are not eligible for housing under our current policy. Therefore, we need to consider options that make it easier for those who may have an interest in moving to these types of accommodation and to decrease the length of time that a property remains unoccupied for.

## 2. Homelessness

Some applicants approach the council as they are at risk of becoming or are currently homeless.

We currently have the following cases:

- *Prevention Stage - cases where the applicant is threatened with homelessness and the team proactively work with applicants to prevent them from becoming homeless, eg, a landlord is selling the property and has given notice for the tenant to leave, parental eviction – 115 cases*
- *Relief Stage – cases where an applicant is already homeless, or has become homeless as the prevention stage was not successful, the team work with the applicant and other external/internal agencies in order to relieve the applicants homelessness, e.g., providing financial assistance with the use of the Homeless Prevention Fund and the housing register – 155 cases*

Although not all of these are eligible to be active on the allocations register, the majority are. Whilst we do not want to make it desirable to make a homeless application, we do need to recognise that these are genuine cases of potential and actual homelessness. This is an opportunity to utilise the housing register as a prevention and relief tool for the Homeless Prevention team. Priority should be given to these cases over other households where there is no identified risk if they were to remain in their current circumstances. This should also relieve some of the additional pressures the homelessness team face when it comes to sourcing Temporary Accommodation and having to make investigations in to homeless applications.

## 3. Eligible applicants not actively bidding

Around 2200 active applicants have not placed a bid in the last 12 months, which may indicate that they are not ready to move and are on the register as a safeguard. We want to ensure that people should only register if they are serious about moving. Whilst they are not bidding, they are still able to accumulate “Time on register” points up to 5 years. This means an applicant who was not actively bidding could take priority over someone who has only recently registered and doing everything that they can to better their circumstances. The removal of time on register points and applicants who have not placed a bid in the last 12 months, would encourage active bidding and allow natural movement within our own housing stock

#### **4. The weight of points**

Our current policy sets out the amount of points an applicant is entitled to, dependant on their circumstances. Applicants can be awarded points for more than one of these circumstances and when combined these points can determine where an applicant sits on a shortlist for a property. Upon reviewing the policy, it was highlighted that these points were not truly reflective of the priority each circumstance warranted.

For example; an applicant could be downsizing by 1 bedroom and have registered 5 years ago. This application would be assessed and awarded 50 points on the register. However, an applicant that lived in a 1 bedroom flat, above first floor without a lift and was lacking a bed space due to sharing a bedroom with their child would only be eligible for 25 points.

#### **5. Management of expectations**

There is often the perception in Dacorum that some people should be entitled to social housing. Unfortunately, this is not feasible given the numbers on the register and the number of social housing properties available. We are in a position where there is a significant number of applicants on the register, who are unlikely to ever be successful. By removing sharing points, removing non-active applicants and reviewing the level of points awarded based on priority, we are able to manage the expectations of those who are unlikely to be eligible and should be able to find their own alternative when sourcing accommodation. Introducing tiered income thresholds dependant on household size, would also allow us to manage how many people were eligible for social housing. This would not only create a more realistic register, but also would help increase the interest in the private rented sector and even encourage home ownership.

### **Proposed Changes to current policy**

The spreadsheet below holds our proposed changes to the current policy after consultation with the wider housing service. We recognise that not all of these will be implemented in to the new policy, but we felt it important to get feedback on all ideas that may help us achieve the goal of a more robust Allocations Policy that gives priority to those most in need of social housing.



Proposed Housing  
Allocation Changes N

### **Next Steps**

We welcome any comments and questions on this report and will look to incorporate all feedback in to the report that will be presented to members on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> December.