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EXECUTIVE – 19th OCTOBER 2009 – now 17 November 2009

HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW

Report by: Councillor Jon Hardy, Lead Member for Housing and Service Improvement

Summary

This report seeks approval to adopt changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy following a full review. The Allocations Policy is one of the Housing Service's most important documents as it sets out how social housing in the borough will be allocated. The policy has been adjusted from time to time, and has become difficult to follow, and in some places contradictory.

These changes aim to prioritise those in the most housing need and introduce greater transparency in the allocation of social housing. It incorporates some recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Allocations held in 2008, as well as recently proposed changes in Guidance issued by the Communities and Local Government Department.

Changes which have been required as a result of recent Ombudsman's recommendations have also been incorporated into the revised policy.

1 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 In order to ensure that there is greater transparency in the allocation of social housing it is recommended that Members:
- (i) agree the adoption of the draft policy as set out at Appendix 1 and the resources required to implement it;
 - (ii) delegate authority to the Lead Member for Housing and Service Improvement to make any minor changes to ensure that the policy meets the requirements of the release of the 'statutory guidelines on social housing allocations for local authorities in England' in November 2009 which is currently being consulted on;
 - (iii) Review the outcomes of the new policy in twelve months' time after adoption to inform part of the Allocation Plan and to monitor its achievements.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since 2002, the Council has been letting its properties under a choice based lettings scheme called Locata, in partnership with other West London boroughs to promote choice in housing. Through this scheme, 90% of available permanent rented social housing properties are advertised to customers.

- 2.2 When a customer makes an application to the Council for housing their circumstances are assessed and they are awarded a band to reflect their housing need and how they will be prioritised for allocation of available properties determined by the housing allocation policy.
- 2.3 In allocating housing the Council (Housing Authority) must comply with the Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and must have regard to the Code of Guidance issued by the Secretary of State under s169 of the Housing Act 1996. This says that a Local Authority's allocation policy has to reflect a number of factors including:
- the Government's housing policy;
 - relevant legal requirements;
 - the LB Hounslow's strategy to tackle the most urgent housing problems ensuring people in housing need receive the help they need;
 - managing the limited availability of social housing in the Borough.
- 2.4 In framing their allocation policy Councils must ensure that reasonable preference for social housing is given to:
- a) people who are homeless;
 - b) people who are owed a duty by any local housing authority or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority;
 - c) People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
 - d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to a disability); and
 - e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others) (S.167(2)).
- 2.5 The scheme may also take into account the financial resources available to a person to meet their housing costs, any behaviour of a person (or of a member of his household) which affects his suitability to be a tenant and any local connection which exists between a person and the authority's district.
- 2.6 Following presentation of the Client and Partnership Scrutiny Panel review of Locata and Hounslow's Allocation Policy in 2008, the Chief Officer in consultation with the Executive Lead Member for Housing agreed the recommendation to review the current Housing Allocation Policy.
- 2.8 A tendering exercise was undertaken and HQN Consultancy Ltd (HQN) were engaged to complete a full review of the text of the Allocations Policy and consult stakeholders on a selection of the new ideas on allocations. The objectives of the review were to ensure that:
- our current policy is up to date with current legislation, case law and good practice
 - the text is plain English, logical and easy to understand
 - all the elements of the policy are consistent and cohesive
 - the policy is compliant with the requirements of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system operated within the West London sub-region

- new ideas to deal with under-occupation, overcrowding, and community cohesion are explored and considered within the context of a reviewed allocations policy and plan.

2.9 The results of the review and consultation and key policy changes were considered by Client and Partnerships Scrutiny Panel on 14 July 2009.

3. KEY POLICY CHANGES

3.1 The new draft policy has been simplified to make it fairer and easier to understand. Some key findings from consultation with customers were that 86% of those responding did not believe that allocations in Hounslow were fair. Representations received from customers indicate that either they do not feel their assessed banding truly reflects their housing circumstances or that their expectations are far greater than what can be achieved with the number of properties we have available.

3.2 The revised policy ensures that the highest priority for social housing is given to those in the greatest housing need. It introduces a fairer system of allocating permanent housing to households to whom the Council owes a statutory duty under the homeless legislation. There has, in recent times, been a pronounced downturn in the numbers accepted as homeless which has enabled a review of the priority awarded to these cases within the allocation policy. Accepted homeless applicants already in accommodation classed, as 'temporary' would be prioritised for housing based on the length of time spent in temporary accommodation. To assist the Council's temporary accommodation reduction plan, the policy aims to help customers before they need to make a homeless application. Along with clear and consistent housing advice the policy can help ensure this resource is available to those in the most housing need and not viewed as a quick route to permanent social housing.

3.3 Furthermore, properties will no longer be routinely advertised as ring-fenced to particular groups (e.g. transfers and homeless families) as this practice can disadvantage some applicants. Restrictions on who can bid for properties with gardens have also been removed, as these were felt to be unfair. To be fairer the revised policy and banding scheme concentrates on housing need not the type of application.

3.4 In tackling our priority of overcrowding, for which we have pathfinder status, the policy will be giving high priority to severely overcrowded council and social housing tenants in the borough.

3.5 Those consulted agreed that larger family homes should be available first to families with children still living at home and many agreed that the focus should be on helping households with older children where bedroom sharing is inappropriate. In order to support this a number of key changes are introduced which:

- introduce the Communities and Local Government (CLG) bedroom standard, so families with younger children sharing do not get high priority for larger homes;
- redefine the household members counted as part of an application, so that households comprising of adults who are not expected to be part of the permanent household and can make their own application for a smaller property (including grown-up children) will not take priority for larger homes.

3.6 To make the best use of social housing it is recommended that priority in the policy is extended further for any under occupying Council tenants, offering a high priority for a

council tenant whose home is bigger than they need and wants to move to a smaller property including downsizing from a two bedroom property.

- 3.7 The local connection criterion within the policy has been amended in line with legislation and case law. The policy ensures that preference is given to local people but in order to comply with legislation this preference has been amended so it does not override the priority we must afford to the reasonable preference categories set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).
- 3.8 The existing assessment panels have been reviewed and ratified to ensure that discretion in the policy is only for exceptional cases. In line with good practice the policy recommends an independent living panel to provide a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to the management of vulnerable and complex housing cases.
- 3.9 The new policy also anticipates the implementation of the London Accessible Housing Register, which aims to provide maximum choice for those who need accessible housing. These changes include extending the property mobility classification, which will require enhanced surveying of void properties by Hounslow Homes and partner social landlords for mobility needs.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 As part of the housing allocation policy project, formal consultation with affected parties took place in two distinct phases, lasting from 9 March 2009 to 19 June 2009 with our housing providers, stakeholders, members and customers.
- 4.2 Our formal consultation sought to engage our stakeholders to help us understand their views and aspirations. This was achieved through consultation forums for stakeholders, customers and members, an online survey, information on our website and through more detailed consultation with our housing partners.
- 4.3 At the events, HQN introduced the background to the review and prompted discussion about the current policy's strengths and weaknesses. For the applicants' focus group, this was a fairly free-form discussion with questions prompting discussion of different family types and issues around bedroom sharing, overcrowding, and health. For all other groups, a range of possible issues or concerns were introduced and stakeholders were asked to discuss whether those concerns were valid; what other issues should be considered and which of the potential solutions proposed might be useful in Hounslow.
- 4.4 A number of amendments to the draft allocation policy have been made following the consultation to take into account the comments made and to ensure the policy is sustainable and legally robust. Full details of the results of the consultation can be seen in the HQN Allocation Policy Review Report.

5 IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 Recently the Housing Minister launched a consultation on a new draft statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England. This aims to better enable local councils to reflect the needs, demands and aspirations of their area in the way that they allocate housing and to make the allocations system in every area better understood and seen to be fair. The new statutory guidance is expected to be issued and introduced in November 2009 and although this policy has taken into account the draft guidance it will be reviewed to take into account any changes in the

new guidance. A recommendation to delegate authority to the Lead Member for Housing and Service Improvement to make any final changes is included as part of this report.

- 5.2 In moving to adopt the new housing allocation policy, LB Hounslow need to take full account of the resources required to implement this policy. Resources will be required to:
- initially review all applications on the housing register
 - re-register applications
 - make changes to the housing application IT systems
 - data cleanse the IT system
 - make changes to the verification process and team procedures
 - communicate with customers about the changes to the policy and how this will affect their application
 - train staff and stakeholders on the changes
 - re-assess applications including banding, family composition, bedroom entitlement and local connection where changes have been made.
- 5.3 We have considered the impact that policy changes will have on the current register. It is important to manage the register so that people awarded Band A or Band B can have a realistic chance of being housed, although time taken to re-house will still depend on the type of property required and how flexible applicants are in their bidding.
- 5.4 All applicants will need to be informed clearly and carefully of the changes to the policy, any changes to their banding and helped to understand what this means for their chances of being re-housed. Households in lower bands will be supported to explore other housing options.
- 5.5 It is estimate that the 6200 cases which are currently in housing need (Bands A – C) will have to be reassessed to consider the impact of the policy changes in their priority, the remaining 6900 cases which are not in housing need (Band D) will be reviewed as part of our re-registration process asking customers if they still wish to remain on the housing register.
- 5.6 The proposed changes include the possibility for relatively low priority 'households' to be given higher priority if that would assist in the better management of the available housing stock where there is under occupation of large family sized council properties.
- 5.7 A project manager for the implementation has been identified and agreement for a further two full time members of staff of the appropriate level to undertake allocation assessment is required for a four month period to undertake the re-registration and re-assessment of cases.
- 5.8 The implementation of the policy impacts the ICT Department and resources will be required in particular OHMS expertise and their availability to the project programmed into the divisions work schedule.
- 5.9 Further resources will need to be identified by Hounslow Homes and the Housing Needs Service to manage the changes in banding and to enable home visits to be undertaken as part of their verification process for transfer cases and customers in

temporary accommodation. The verification process will be reviewed and recommendations made as part of this review.

- 5.10 If agreed the implementation of the policy will be carefully project managed, a project plan and group will be created for the implementation phase. It is recommended that the implementation project begins immediately with the policy implemented and changes going live to customers in May 2010.

6 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken by HQN for this policy to ensure that all our customers receive fair and equal treatment when participating in Locata (see HQN Housing Allocation Policy Review Report).
- 6.2 The policy does impact directly on equality groups; it is not intended to have an adverse impact on any particular group as it is based on housing need. The housing register and lettings of accommodation will be monitored to ensure that any particular group is not disadvantaged and has equal access to this service.

7 COMMENTS OF THE BOROUGH SOLICITOR

- 7.1 The Borough Solicitor supports the recommendations.

8. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

- 8.1 Any costs incurred as a result of the recommendations in this report, and in particular those arising from the implementation as described in section 5, must be funded from existing budgets.

Background Papers:

Draft London Borough of Hounslow Housing Allocation Policy 2009

HQN Housing Allocation Policy Review Report, includes:

- Results of Consultation on the Proposed Allocation Policy
- Housing Allocation Policy Equalities Impact Assessment

Part VI Housing Act 1996 as amended (www.statutelaw.gov.uk)

Homelessness Act 2002 (www.statutelaw.gov.uk)

Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (www.statutelaw.gov.uk)

Allocation of Accommodation: Code of guidance for local housing authorities - November 2002 Revision (www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/allocationaccommodationcode)

Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings - Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities (www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/lettingscodeguidance)

Fair and flexible - Draft statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England –

Consultation (www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/allocationguideconsultation)

Choice or No Choice? - Scrutiny Review of LOCATA & Hounslow Allocations Policy (<http://democraticservices.hounslow.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=250>)

Client and Partnerships Scrutiny Panel 14/07/09

(<http://democraticservices.hounslow.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=250&MId=4871>)

This report has been or is due to be considered by:

CMT – 17 September 2009

EXECUTIVE 19 October 2009

This report is relevant to the following wards/areas:

All

London Borough of Hounslow
DRAFT Housing Allocations Policy
(including transfer policy for tenants of Hounslow Homes)

August 2009

DRAFT

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This document sets out the London Borough of Hounslow's housing allocations scheme as required under section 167 of the Housing Act 1996. It explains the procedures and priorities for the letting of permanent council and Locata partner properties in the area. It is also the policy used by Hounslow Homes to assess applications from existing secure tenants who wish to transfer to another property.

The policy explains how people can apply to join the Housing Register, how their need for social housing will be assessed and how our choice-based lettings scheme works.

This policy has been produced with regard to the housing allocation requirements for local authorities under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).

1.1 *Prioritising housing*

The Council is required by law to give priority to certain groups, these are defined by the current statutory reasonable preference categories which are set out in s.167(2) of the 1996 Act. These were rationalised in the Homelessness Act 2002 (and further refined by the Housing Act 2004) and are based on housing need.

These groups (reasonable preference categories) are:

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act); this includes people who are intentionally homeless, and those who do not have a priority need for accommodation
- (b) people who are owed a duty by any local authority under s.190(2), s.193(2) or s.195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under s.65(2) or s.68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any local authority under s.192(3)
- (c) people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability, and
- (e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

As well as the groups the government says we must help, we have also decided to give priority to tenants who will release a family-size home.

The policy aims to be clear about how we prioritise who will be offered the properties available and how we balance the demand for affordable rented housing with the limited supply available, whilst ensuring those in the most urgent housing need are offered some choice over where they live.

In our housing allocation scheme, called Locata, existing tenants seeking transfers and homeseekers apply for membership of the scheme and are placed in one of four priority bands, A, B, C or D based on their housing need. Those applicants given reasonable preference within the scheme will be placed into priority bands A, B and C. All other applicants will be placed in band D. Once registered, applicants (known as 'members') can search advertised properties and express interest (known as 'bidding') in properties they would like to be considered for. Available properties are advertised regularly on the Locata website and in a magazine, called Locata Home.

Properties will be offered to applicants based on the following priorities:

1. Priority Banding
2. Local Connection
3. Priority date (when registration into the highest priority band took place)

Adapted properties will be advertised according to a mobility classification system and properties will be matched with applicants who need that type of property.

There is a very severe shortage of Council and housing association homes in Hounslow.

If you are not in urgent housing need, you are unlikely to ever be offered a council or housing association home. It is important to consider housing choices that are open to you, these may include:

- Privately rented housing
- Low cost home ownership
- Reducing your overcrowding by helping some members of your household move to their own accommodation
- Moving to an area of the country where council and/or housing association properties are more freely available
- Staying where you are, but getting help to make your property more suitable for your needs
- A mutual exchange (swapping homes with another social housing tenant).

We will help and advise you on options that may be suitable for you. We can advise you about how realistic your chances of being offered a Council or housing association home might be.

If you are already homeless, or think you may be going to lose your home, you should contact the Council's Prevention and Housing Advice Service. It is important that you talk to us as soon as possible – we may be able to help you to keep your current home, at least for a time whilst you explore your housing options. If you do become homeless and the Council accept a duty to house you, you may face a long time in temporary accommodation before being housed more permanently.

1.2 Lettings covered by this policy

All properties owned by the Council (managed by Hounslow Homes) and most properties owned by housing associations in the Borough will be offered to people on our Housing Register under the terms of this policy.

The following lettings are not included in this policy:

- Lettings which housing associations make outside of nominations agreements. Nomination agreements usually cover 50% of 1 and 2 bed vacancies, 75% of larger properties and 100% of newly built properties
- Where a Court makes a decision about a tenancy (such as an order under the Children Act)

- Where a tenancy is created for someone already living in the home as temporary accommodation ('temporary to permanent')
- Where the Council or its partners have commitments to third parties. This includes reciprocal lettings with neighbouring boroughs
- Where we need to react to extraordinary circumstances such as fire or other emergency. In such situations, senior officers will take the decision to make an exception to policy
- Where we let a property directly to someone who needs temporary accommodation only. This may include people who need to move out for a while whilst refurbishment is carried out (temporary decant), but does not include permanent decants
- Properties that are let in conjunction with employment by the Council, such as to caretakers
- Mutual exchanges
- Properties where someone has the right to succeed to the tenancy
- Allocations to an individual where there may be a public protection risk.

1.3 Choice-based lettings

The government requires all local authorities to offer an element of choice to housing applicants. Hounslow operates a choice-based lettings system, which means that you can express an interest in the homes you wish to be considered for which meet your assessed need. This is explained more in [Chapter 5: How to bid](#).

Our choice-based lettings scheme Locata, is a partnership scheme with other West London boroughs and housing associations. Each partner borough has their own allocation policy to address local needs, but use similar banding and work together in a common scheme.

To be considered for a property you need to participate actively in the scheme by bidding for properties that are available and meet your assessed need. In reality, the shortage of housing is so severe that any applicants who are restrictive about their choices of property type or area may not be able to find housing.

To help you make well informed decisions about your future housing we will provide clear and timely information of the likelihood of finding accommodation through the scheme.

1.4 Equality and diversity

Hounslow is home to people from a wide range of backgrounds. We are committed to equal opportunities in housing. This means that we seek to ensure that priority for housing is based on housing need and that housing policies are fair to all sections of the community regardless of age, disability, gender, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation.

We want our services to be accessible to everyone who lives in Hounslow. If you need extra help to be able to use our services, such as translation and interpretation services, large print or signing, please tell us.

All applicants for housing or re-housing will be asked to provide details of age and gender. This is to allow us to assess your application properly as well as to monitor who is allocated housing, and

to ensure that properties are being offered and allocated fairly. Applicants may also be asked to provide details of their ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. If you choose not to give us this information it will not affect your application for housing in any way.

We will review our allocation policy regularly to ensure it remains fair to people in housing need in Hounslow.

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Chapter 2: The allocations policy

This chapter is a summary of our allocations policy. There is more detail about how we operate the policy in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

2.1 *Who can apply to join the Housing Register?*

Anyone who is eligible and aged 18 or over can join the Housing Register.

There are people who are not eligible to join the Housing Register, these are:

- Anyone who is subject to immigration control and does not have leave to remain in the UK, or does not have permission to benefit from government help (this is generally referred to as 'no recourse to public funds'), as determined by the Secretary of State.
- Anyone who is unsuitable to be a tenant because they, or a member of their household who lives with them, have engaged in unacceptable behaviour*

*Unacceptable behaviour means behaviour serious enough that a council or housing association landlord could obtain a possession order requiring you to leave your home.

The types of behaviour are defined in the Housing Act 1985 s.84, grounds 1-7.

- Serious anti-social behaviour, nuisance or annoyance to neighbours
- Rent arrears equating to more than six weeks' rent unless you have cleared your account, or have an arrangement to pay which you have kept to for at least six months
- Breach of tenancy agreement including illegal or immoral use of the property or domestic violence
- Serious deterioration in the condition of the property resulting from your actions
- You or a member of your household obtained the tenancy fraudulently, or by making a payment in connection with a mutual exchange.

If your landlord has obtained a possession order on these grounds within the last two years, or is seeking one, or has evidence that such behaviour is happening, we can exclude you from the Housing Register. The evidence that we would take into account would have to be of a similar standard to that which would be required by the courts. We will check with your landlord whether any arrears on the account are true rent arrears.

Any household can be excluded from the register for unacceptable behaviour, not only those who were previously a local authority (council) or housing association tenant.

If you are excluded from the register you can re-apply when you can demonstrate that you and/or members of your household have adhered to the terms of any anti-social behaviour agreement, contract or order for at least 12 months. You can also re-apply if any convictions for anti-social or similar behaviour are now spent.

If you are a council or housing association tenant with rent arrears, you will be eligible to join the Housing Register if you have a court order or a local agreement with your landlord, and have been making regular payments towards your arrears for a minimum period, which is usually at

least six months. Only rent arrears can be taken into consideration, not other debts.

If we decide that you are not eligible for the Housing Register, we will write to you to explain the reason. You can ask us to review the decision. Every application is treated individually and we will take into account any extenuating or mitigating factors for which you can provide evidence. How we carry out a review of a decision is detailed in [section 6.2, what to do if you disagree with our decisions](#).

The Housing Register is open to all eligible persons, regardless of where you live now. However, because of the shortage of accommodation in Hounslow, we will give preference to applicants who live locally. More information about [out-of-borough applicants](#) is contained in [section 2.6](#).

2.2 Who you can include on your application

We assess the size of property you require based on who is included on your application. You can include only members of your [immediate family](#) who normally live with you (or who would live with you if it were possible for them to do so) [or other people who have an extenuating need to live with you](#).

Immediate family means:

- You (the main applicant)
- Your spouse or partner. By 'partner' we mean someone you live with as your partner or who you would live with as a partner if they were able to do so. This includes mixed-gender and same-sex couples and whether or not you are married or in a civil partnership
- Your children or your partner's children, if they are aged under 21 and live with you all the time, or for four or more nights every week.

Immediate family does not include your or your partner's: parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, or lodgers – unless they have an extenuating need to live with you. Non dependant adults, whether related or unrelated, are generally expected to make their own housing application.

If you have adult children, aged 21 or over, or with their own family living at home, they may apply to the Housing Register in their own right, but they may have more chance of success in moving to a property in the private sector.

The following household applicants cannot be included in an application:

- Friends, lodgers, sub-tenants and any other adults not listed above wishing to be included in order to share accommodation with the applicant
- Anyone who has moved into the current property without good reason and caused the household to be overcrowded
- Anyone who does not intend to move to any accommodation offered to the applicant(s) or does not intend to live with them permanently

Such people will be disregarded for the purpose of assessing any overcrowding priority and the size of property that the household requires.

If you have been accepted as statutorily homeless by the Council, we will consider, as your household, all those who were on your original homelessness application. However, you may wish to consider if it would be best for your adult children to be considered for housing separately.

2.2.1 People who have an extenuating need to live with you in order to give or to receive care or support.

You can include someone on your application if they need to live with you in order to give or receive care or support. This may include a carer, if you require a live in full time carer and live alone, or no one in your immediate household is able to care for you. You will need to explain on your application the reason why additional person needs to live with you and demonstrate:

- that they need to be supported or cared for and are dependant on you (this may be for an elderly relative who requires your care or an adult child who is still dependant on you as they are in full time education)
- that other satisfactory arrangements cannot be made
- that the arrangement is 'permanent'

We may also require you to provide evidence such as that the person requires your support or care; for example proof that you/they are providing care and in receipt of care allowances.

2.2.2 Family members who are not currently living with you

If you are applying to include family members who are living abroad, we will register your application but you cannot be re-housed together until the family have been reunited in the UK and we will not include on your application those family members who are not resident in the UK at the time you submit your application.

If you are applying to be reunited with family members living elsewhere in the UK (anywhere outside of the London Borough of Hounslow), you can include them on your application so long as they meet the definition above. You should also consider applying to be re-housed where they live, especially if the demand for housing is lower there.

In joint access cases bedroom eligibility will be awarded to the main care provider This means that the children live with you for more than half the week (four nights or more). It usually also means that you are in receipt of child benefit or tax credits and we will take into consideration both parents' housing arrangements to ensure that one property has adequate accommodation for the children. This does not prohibit the other parent from maintaining their usual and agreed access to the children, but they may have to accept an element of overcrowding, use of a reception room, or consider renting privately. When couples share legal custody of their children equally, unless there were other factors impacting on the assessment, the Council seeks not to favour one parent above another when assessing their separate applications. Although an applicant may be eligible for an extra bedroom/s on the grounds of joint custody this would not in itself receive exceptional or high priority. In these cases the accommodation available to the child with either parent will be considered for any claim of statutory overcrowding.

2.3 How many bedrooms are you eligible for?

You can apply for accommodation of the right size for your household's needs according to our assessment. In Hounslow, we operate to the 'bedroom standard' as defined by government.

The bedroom standard allocates a separate bedroom to:

- Married or cohabiting couple;

- Adult aged 21 or more;
- Pair of adolescents aged 10-20 years of the same sex; and
- Pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex.

Any unpaired person aged 10-20 years is paired, if possible, with a child aged under 10 years of the same sex or, if that is not possible given a separate bedroom. The same applies to any unpaired child aged under 10 years.

For overcrowding or under occupation priority the standard is then compared with the number of bedrooms available for the sole use of the household.

We will only allow bedrooms for people who are entitled to be on your application.

If you are pregnant, you should notify us when the baby is born to update your application and we will review your bedroom entitlement depending on your household composition.

If you have applied to enable or already have fostered and/or adopted and have been referred by the Borough's Children Services Department, separate bedrooms will be an entitlement for all children placed in your care where the children are not siblings. Siblings will be entitled to bedrooms in line with the bedroom standards.

2.3.1 Special reasons why you might need an additional bedroom

There may be exceptional cases when you are eligible to apply for properties with an extra bedroom, in addition to the number of people living in your household,

This will only be in exceptional circumstances, such as the need for an extra room to install medical equipment that would otherwise be life threatening and require admission to hospital for treatment, for example a kidney dialysis machine. An applicant may be eligible for an additional bedroom for a carer where they can demonstrate that a live in carer is essential, the carer has been identified and has moved in with the household or is ready to do so when the accommodation is available

We will allow you an extra bedroom if:

- you need an additional bedroom because of a medical issues recommended by the Council's housing medical advisor, or community care team
- you are an under-occupier vacating a large family home (three or more bedrooms)
- you are bidding for properties where this has been allowed under a local lettings scheme
- we have made an undertaking to offer you a larger property as part of a legal or contractual agreement.

We do not have large (4+ bedroom) properties become available very often, if you have a large family and are overcrowded we can allow you to move to a property up to one bedroom or two bed-spaces smaller than you need. This can allow you to consider other properties which meet your families needs better than your current home. We will only allow you to bid for properties which would not statutorily overcrowd your household.

Where we advertised parlour-type properties – this is where there are two living rooms - we will count one of these as a bedroom (if it is self contained). If your current accommodation is a parlour-type property, we will also count the second living room as a bedroom and this means that

whilst you may have considered your household overcrowded because you may not be using your second living room as a bedroom, we may not consider you overcrowded.

2.3.2 Additional Bedrooms Required on Joint Access Grounds

In joint access cases bedroom eligibility will be awarded to the parent in receipt of child benefit and will take into consideration both parents' housing arrangements to ensure that one property has adequate accommodation for the children. This does not prohibit the other parent from maintaining their usual and agreed access to the children, but they may have to accept an element of overcrowding, the use of a reception room, or consider renting privately. Although an applicant may be eligible for an extra bedroom/s on the grounds of joint custody this would not in itself receive exceptional or high priority.

2.4 How we decide who is in most need of housing

Everyone on the Housing Register has a reason for wanting or needing to move. It is not always easy to appreciate why someone else should be given priority over you. We use this policy to ensure that the accommodation that is available is offered to those who are in the most housing need.

Some households need to be re-housed because their current home is not suitable for their needs. It may be too small, may not have the facilities they need, or it may need extensive work. Some people have a medical condition or disability that means they need to move.

The housing needs of everyone who applies is assessed according to this policy and given a Band; A, B, C or D.

We allocate properties to people who have been assessed as having the most housing need, that is, in the highest Priority Band.

Properties will be offered to applicants based on the following priorities:

1. Priority Banding
2. Local Connection
3. Priority date (when registration into the highest priority band took place)

There are some additional rules concerning out-of-borough applicants, applicants with financial resources ([see section 2.7](#)), property types and local lettings plans/scheme-specific plans ([see section 4.21](#)).

In the unusual event that two applicants have the same band, local connection status and priority date, the Council will consider both applications and has absolute discretion to offer it to the household that it believes should have priority, bearing in mind household circumstances and the location and type of property.

2.5 Priority Bands

When you apply to join our housing register you will have your housing need assessed and be given a priority band. These bands are a way for us to make sure we offer housing to people who are in the most need. These bands take into account the people who we need to give preference to as set out by the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

The four priority bands are:

- Band A: Emergency and extreme need to move
- Band B: Urgent need to move
- Band C: Housing need
- Band D: All other applicants.

Band A: Emergency and extreme need to move

This band includes households who will typically be suffering exceptional hardship and may be facing significant health risks made worse by their current housing situation. This band also includes some social housing transfer cases where a larger or adapted property would be made available for others on the housing register.

This band is closely monitored and assessments are verified to ensure the most urgent and severe cases can be helped within the constraints of the limited housing stock available. Band A cases will be reviewed 3 months from the date of being awarded. Where households in Band A are failing to bid on suitable properties and are receiving adequate support to enable them to be proactive or have refused property offers the Council reserves the right to review the decision as to whether Band A still accurately reflects the urgency of the case. In certain situations conditions can improve and Band A may no longer be appropriate. Reviews of banding decisions can result in households moving into lower banding when there is evidence to suggest the urgency has decreased.

This band includes all applications from:

- Anyone who has been awarded an emergency priority to move. Normally emergency priority is only agreed for those who would be at severe risk if they remain in the current property and it has been agreed that they should be directly offered a property. Emergency priority is decided by an Allocations Panel. Applications for emergency priority are normally referred by other agencies, such as the police or social services. Households with emergency priority will be given preference over other households in Band A
- Anyone with an emergency medical need, as assessed by the Council. Emergency medical need is serious or life-threatening health problems where your current housing is having a significant adverse effect on your condition. This might include, for example, someone with severe mobility problems, or someone who needs a dialysis unit which cannot be provided in the current home, and the home cannot be adapted to accommodate this
- Council tenants who need an urgent move because their home will be demolished within the next 12 months. We call this group 'decants'
- Council tenants who live in specially adapted homes suitable for the needs of disabled people, who do not need these adaptations and their adapted property is required for others in housing need
- Council or Locata partner tenants living in the Borough who are giving up at least a two-bedroom property to move to smaller accommodation. This includes tenants on the 'Trading Places' scheme ([see section 4.5](#)).
- People who have the right to succeed to a Council tenancy, but who are living in a home which is larger than they need

- Employees or ex-employees of the Council, whom the Council has a contractual duty to re-house. The council will not undertake to re-house the occupant unless his/her household fulfil the criteria of the Housing Act 1985 and they are not deemed to be intentionally homeless or where the service occupants are dismissed for misconduct; or undergo a change of employment due to promotion; or are offered alternative employment where there is no longer a need to occupy the tied accommodation for better performance of duties.
- Anyone else we have a statutory obligation to house, such as under a closure order or compulsory purchase order.

Applicants in this band have the highest priority for re-housing. You should bid actively for homes through Locata to maximise your chances of being re-housed. However, if you have an urgent need to move, other options may still be able to solve your housing difficulties more quickly, especially if you need a large family home. Our Housing Officers will discuss your options with you.

Band B: Urgent need to move

Households placed in this band will have been assessed as having an urgent need to move. Band B cases will be reviewed after six months from the date of being awarded to ensure there is still an urgent need to move.

This band includes all applications from:

- Anyone with an urgent medical need as assessed by the Council. Urgent medical need is serious health problems where your current housing is having an adverse affect and your health may deteriorate without a move to more suitable accommodation
- Council and Locata partner tenants living in the Borough who are severely overcrowded and need at least two more bedrooms
- Households to whom the Council owes a duty to re-house and require to be moved as part of the temporary accommodation reduction plan
- Residents of short term London Borough of Hounslow 'supporting people' funded supported housing schemes ready to move on into independent accommodation, where the applicant has completed a planned support and resettlement package verified by the Resettlement team
- Any applicant who needs to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability which he or she or a member of their household has sustained as a result of service in the armed forces
- Young people over eighteen years old leaving care who have been looked after by Hounslow Council, who have a care package in place and are ready for an independent tenancy as verified by the Resettlement Service

Applicants in Band B have a high priority for housing, but may have to wait a long time to be re-housed, other options may still be able to solve your housing difficulties more quickly. You should bid actively for homes through Locata to maximise your chances of being re-housed.

Band C: Housing needs

Households placed in this band will have been assessed as not having an urgent need to be re-housed, there may be less severe factors which fall into reasonable preference categories, outlined

Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). For example, less severe health problems, that is unlikely to be significantly improved by a move to alternative accommodation.

This band includes all applications from:

- Overcrowded households as defined by the Council, not included in Band B band reason
- Anyone with a low priority medical need, that is, less severe health problems which will be improved by a move to alternative accommodation
- Anyone who has a welfare need to move to a particular locality within the district, in order to give or to receive care or support
- Homeless households, unless they are placed in Band B under the terms of the temporary accommodation plan.
- Anyone living in poor housing where the Private Sector Housing serve a improvement notice, emergency prohibition order or prohibition order they can recommend priority is given on the housing register. We will take into account the likelihood of any remedial works being done, how long they were likely to take and if the effect of the Order is likely to be that the household will become homeless unless they have alternative accommodation
- Applicants who are leaving prison or rehabilitation who have no home to return to and are vulnerable due to being institutionalised, requiring a permanent home to prevent reoffending as recommended by probation and resettlement services. You are not guaranteed an offer at the time of your release, and it is recommended that you seek advice from our housing officers before your release. In many cases Hounslow Council will have no statutory duty to provide you with housing and you will need to make alternative arrangements. If you find alternative accommodation your application will be reassessed to take account of your new circumstances.
- Anyone to whom the Council has given a written undertaking to allow them to remain in Band C, e.g. a household which has been homeless and has accepted a qualifying offer in the private sector.

Applicants in Band C can expect to wait a very long time to be re-housed. Our Housing Officers will work with you to consider other housing options that may be available to you.

Band D: Not in housing need or able to meet own needs

Household placed in this band do not meet any of the criteria set out in the reasonable preference categories, outlined in Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) or applicants with housing needs as identified by a reasonable preference category but have financial resources to rent or buy in the private sector including owner occupiers.

This does not assume any legal duty or any other obligation on the Council's part to provide accommodation.

This band includes all applications from:

- Applicants who would be placed in a higher band due to their housing circumstances but who have significant financial resources such that they could reasonably be expected to meet their own housing needs will also be placed in Band D ([see section 2.7](#))

- Homeless applicants placed in temporary accommodation whose applications have not yet been decided by the Council will be placed in Band D whilst a decision on their homeless application is being made
- All other applicants.

Applicants in Band D are unlikely to be re-housed unless they are looking for low demand accommodation and are encouraged to explore alternative housing options. In the unlikely event that, there were no expressions of interest from anyone in Band A, B or C, on a particular property, Band D bids would then be considered for that property.

2.6 Local connection and out-of-borough applicants

The Council will give priority for housing to people who can demonstrate a 'local connection' to the London Borough of Hounslow. We can take this into account in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

If you do not have a connection to the Borough, you will be considered to be an 'out-of-borough applicant', and you will normally only be considered for housing if there are no applicants with the same level of priority need who have a local connection. This means that an out-of-borough applicant in Band A will only be considered for housing if no applicant in Band A with a local connection bids for that property.

You will be considered to have a local connection to Hounslow if:

- you have lived in the Borough for six out of the last 12 months, or for three out of the last five years.
- you have close family who have lived in the Borough for the past five years. Close family includes parents, children, brothers or sisters. It may also include other family members if you have a very close relationship (for example, if you were brought up by an aunt, uncle or grandparent).
- you have a permanent job based in the Borough
- a homeless duty to you has been accepted by the London Borough of Hounslow
- you are leaving or have recently left the armed forces and have been based in the Borough for at least 12 months, even if you have not been resident all that time because of overseas service. This duty arises from section 315 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- you have another special circumstance. You may be able to show you have a local connection for another special reason. For example, you may need to live in an area to receive specialist health care.

If you do not have such a connection to Hounslow, you will be considered as an out-of-borough applicant.

2.7 If you own your own home, or have access to significant income or savings

In determining priority within the Housing Register and when taking into consideration reasonable preference the Council can take account the financial resources you have to meet your own housing costs.

As a consequence of this, if you have sufficient financial resources to resolve your own housing difficulties without the help of the Council, including owning your own property, you will be given lower priority Band D.

We will take into account your individual circumstances including the amount of funds you have available, any special type of property you require and your age. Each year we will review the amount of income and savings that we define as sufficient financial resources, and publish this. Please [see appendix 2](#) for further information.

If you have your own financial resources, we can provide advice and assistance on other housing options available to you including helping you to access shared ownership and other low-cost home ownership products.

If you have recently sold your home or have given some of your money away we may assess you as if you still had these assets unless there is a good reason not to.

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HOW THE SCHEME WORKS

Chapter 3: Applying to the Housing Register

3.1 How to apply

To apply for housing in the London Borough of Hounslow, you must complete an application form.

3.1.1 Applications from existing tenants of the London Borough of Hounslow

If you currently rent your home from Hounslow Council and want to apply for a transfer, you can obtain an application form from Hounslow Homes. The application process is different to that described below if you are applying for a transfer. You can apply online at www.locata.org/housingregister or you can contact Hounslow Homes to request an application form. Please see [section 6.1](#) for contact details.

3.1.2 Applications from all other persons

Your application will be dealt with by the Housing Register Team at the Civic Centre if you are currently:

- privately renting your home;
- living with family or friends;
- living in accommodation that you own or part-own; and
- are not threatened with homelessness in 28 days; or
- are an assured tenant of a housing association

All customers who fit into one of these categories and want to join Hounslow's Housing Register will be asked to visit the housing section of our web site http://www.hounslow.gov.uk/allocations_policy_2007-2.pdf

Here you will be able to access an electronic form that will determine whether you should submit an online or paper application for housing. If you are directed towards a paper application, you will be able to print an application form that you will need to complete and submit to the Housing Register Team, together with proof of your eligibility for an allocation of housing. Please [see Appendix 1](#) for a list of documents that can be accepted by the Council as proof of eligibility.

If you do not have access to a computer, the web, or are unable to use a computer and do not have anyone to help you, please call Housing Needs on 020 8583 4422.

Everyone who wants to join the Housing Register has to fill in an application form. This is to make sure that we have the information needed to decide your priority for housing and to make sure that each application is assessed under this policy and the relevant legislation.

If you need help to complete the application and you are unable to get assistance from relatives or friends, a support worker or staff at other advice centres, our Housing Register Officers will be able to help you.

You must answer the questions on the form fully, and ensure that you provide the documents required to confirm your eligibility, by answering all the questions on the form fully you will be helping us to assess your housing need correctly. If you do not your application form will be considered incomplete and will be returned to you for completion.

We will ask you for evidence to support your application. This will include proof of residence, proof of identity, and evidence to support your claim that you have a housing need. For more about proofs see [section 3.3](#), and, for an up-to-date list of acceptable proofs, [see Appendix 1](#).

If you do not provide the information requested within the timescales set, we will not register your application and you will not be able to bid for properties. If we are unable to register your application we will write to tell you this.

In order to ensure that the Council is seen to be treating all applicants fairly, any application for housing from the following groups must be disclosed:

- Members of the Council or their relatives or friends
- Employees of the Council/Hounslow Homes or their relatives or friends.

Any such applications will be assessed under this policy, but registration of the application, assessments of housing need and any offers of properties will be authorised by a housing manager unconnected with the applicant.

3.2 Freedom of information, data protection and prevention and detection of fraud

When we receive your complete application to join the Housing Register, we will register your details on our database. We have a duty to protect public funds. The Council is part of the National Fraud Initiative and the information you give on your form will be stored on a computer and may be shared with other Council departments (such as Housing Benefits and Council Tax) and public agencies (such as the Department for Work and Pensions) solely to detect and prevent fraud.

We will also share the information you give us with housing associations and other housing authorities for the purposes of housing nominations and to prevent and detect fraud.

If you involve a councillor in your enquiry, information you have provided about your application will be shared with the councillor. They will keep that information confidential.

Any medical information you supply will be confidential to officers within the Housing department and as appropriate, the Council's housing medical advisor and occupational therapy team and will only be shared with other departments or agencies for the purposes of fraud detection and prevention. The recommendations, made by the Council's housing medical advisor or occupational therapist, for your band, or the type of property you need, will be shared with housing officers and potential landlords.

You must tell the truth. It is an offence to obtain, or attempt to obtain, a tenancy by deception. Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996 makes it an offence to withhold information that we reasonably require to assess your application, or to provide false information that leads to your gaining a tenancy. We will take appropriate action against anyone who gains a tenancy through knowingly providing false information. This may mean you could lose your home and face criminal prosecution.

If you provide false information and we discover this before you have obtained a home we will exclude you from the Housing Register, and we may also prosecute you. If we feel that you have deliberately made your housing circumstances worse in order to increase your priority for a social tenancy we may place you in Band D, even if you have a need which would normally place you in a higher band.

If an employee of the Council or Hounslow Homes, a member of the Council or a friend/relative of a Council/Hounslow Homes employee or member of the Council fails to disclose this on their application, we will investigate whether an attempt to commit fraud has been made and the Council will take legal action as necessary.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, you have the right to access personal information we hold about you. We will not provide information about anyone else's application. If you want to access your personal records, you should submit your request in writing to us. We will undertake to provide copies of the personal information on your housing file or on the computerised database within 20 days of the written request being received. There may be a small fee for this to cover the administration costs and you will be provided with a fees notice in writing, following receipt of your request under the Act.

3.3 Providing proofs to us

This section does not apply to Hounslow Council tenants applying for a transfer.

If you submit a paper application, you must provide the following in person to the Civic Centre. Documents to be submitted:

- Proof of identity and proof that you have the right to reside in the UK, and the right to benefit from government help. For list of currently acceptable documents [see appendix 1](#)
- One passport-sized photograph each for the main and joint applicant only (photograph must be full face and without a hat)
- Proof of your current address.

Applicants will be advised fully, at the time they submit an application, of the documents required to assess eligibility. All documents submitted will be photocopied: copies will be kept on file, and original documents returned to you. We will keep the originals of the passport-sized photographs.

3.4 Processing your application

When we receive your application we will process it within 28 working days. If you are not eligible to join the Housing Register, we will write to you to explain the reason.

If you are eligible, we will assess your basic housing need so that we can register your application. You may have told us about a medical condition which requires an assessment of medical priority. This will take time and to avoid delaying your inclusion on the Housing Register we will proceed with this type of assessment after we have registered your application.

Once your application has been included on the Housing Register you will automatically become a member of Locata. You will receive a membership pack from Locata which will include; a Locata Scheme User Guide, the current edition of Locata HOME magazine and a letter to inform you that you have been registered as either a homeseeker (applicant) or a transfer applicant. This letter will also give you the following information:

- Locata Identification Number (LIN) – this identifies you on the Housing Register and should be quoted when contacting the Housing Department/Hounslow Homes about your housing/transfer application
- priority Band and the reason for banding
- priority date (see [section 3.5](#) below)

- the size of property you can bid for (number of bedrooms/bed-spaces)

Following assessment of your basic housing need and registration of your application, we will continue with our assessment of your housing need. We may write to you to request more information if we feel that we do not have enough or we will send you additional forms to complete so that we can proceed with our assessment. We may need to refer your application to the Council's housing medical advisor, the occupational therapist or to the Allocations Panel. We will advise you if this is the case.

You can then bid for properties, which is explained more in [section 5](#).

3.5 Priority dates

Your priority date is important, as if there are a number of bids from households in the same band and who have the same local connection status, priority will be given to the household with the earliest priority date, i.e. the household that has been waiting the longest. For most people, your priority date will be the date you applied to join the Housing Register or if you have moved up a Band, the date that you moved into that band if your housing situation has become more urgent since joining the housing register. There are some exceptions to this explained below:

Category	Priority date
Medical priority	Date that medical form was received
Decants	12 months before expected date of demolition of property
Households accepted as statutorily homeless	Date that homelessness application was made
Under-occupying household	Date requested move due to under-occupation
Sheltered applicants	Date assessed as suitable for sheltered

If your circumstances change and you are moved up a band, the priority date will be the date that you moved to the new band, unless this is overridden by the information set out above.

If your circumstances change and you are moved down a band, the priority date will be the earliest date that you have been eligible for that band. For example, if you were in Band A and you are subsequently placed in band D, due to a reassessment of your application your priority date for band D will then be the date you first applied to join the Housing Register.

3.6 Keeping your application up to date

You must inform us if your circumstances change, for example; if you have a baby, a partner moves into your home, someone who lived with you moves out of your home or you change your address. You will be asked to complete a 'change of circumstances form' and will need to provide proof of the changes you are reporting, for example, by providing your baby's birth certificate. We will then reassess your application and if the outcome is a different priority band, we will send you written confirmation of your new priority band, the reason for it, and your priority date.

If you are in Band A or Band B, we will monitor your bidding and regularly review your application to ensure you are still in emergency or urgent need of housing.

If you are successful in bidding for a property, we will check that your details are still correct before we offer you the property. If you have failed to update your application by informing us of any changes to your circumstance, you will not be eligible for the property for which you have bid.

3.7 Re-Registrations

In order to ensure the housing register is up to date your housing application will be reviewed every 12 months. All households are required to complete an annual review form, which will be sent to you. If you fail to re-register within one month your housing application will be cancelled. If you are a vulnerable person and have support needs, and/or you have an urgent priority need, you will be contacted by phone or further letter, allowing a further period to re-register.

If there is no contact and you fail to re-register, your housing application will be removed from the housing register.

3.8 Offers to people with support needs

When an individual with support needs are top of a shortlist for a property, any offer of accommodation will usually be subject to full assessment of support needs and the prospective tenant's ability and willingness to engage with support services and on-going support planning. This will be with the aim of helping the new tenant maintain his/her new tenancy successfully.

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Chapter 4: Assessing your priority band

When you apply the information you provide will help us to assess your housing need and place you in the appropriate priority band. The following sections show how we make these decisions. Some decisions are made by housing officers, others by specialists or senior officers. If you disagree with our decision on your band, you can request a review as explained further in [section 6.2](#).

4.1 *Assessing medical needs*

If you think you, or any member of your household on your application, have a medical need which is caused or made worse by your current home or can only be met in a different kind of property, you can request a medical assessment.

The starting point of our assessment is your current accommodation. If it meets your needs no medical priority will be awarded. Next, we consider whether your illness or disability is exacerbated by your current housing and, finally, whether a move would improve your medical condition or quality of life.

You will have to complete a form, 'application for medical priority' available from us or if you are a Hounslow Council tenant from Hounslow Homes. We do not require a letter from your GP, other medical practitioners who provide treatment or social workers. You must answer the questions on the form fully as if you do not the form will be returned to you for completion. You will need to explain how your current housing is having an impact on your medical condition and why you believe that moving would improve your health. It is important that you provide as much information as you can to help us assess your medical priority and include on the form information about any member of your household who is to be re-housed with you.

If your medical condition is made worse by the poor state of your housing for example, damp in your home, we will refer your case to the Council's Private Sector Housing Unit to inspect your accommodation. They will use any powers they have to take action to force your landlord to repair your home in order to improve your housing situation and so reduce any detrimental impact on your health. We will not proceed with any assessment of medical priority until we are in receipt of a report from the Private Sector Housing Unit and we are satisfied that remedial action carried out by your landlord will not improve your medical condition. You must cooperate with officers from the Private Sector Housing Unit and your landlord to ensure that repairs can be carried out, if you do not it may be considered as a deliberate action to make your housing situation worse in order to increase your priority for a social tenancy. This may result in a decision on our part to reduce your priority to band D even if you have a need which would normally place you in a higher band.

If your application for medical priority shows any medical needs that could be improved by a move to a different property, it may be passed to either our housing medical advisor, or to the occupational therapists, or both. The Council's housing medical advisor may need to contact your GP, other medical practitioners involved in your care, or your social/support worker, to obtain more information. Our Council's housing medical advisor will not need to see you or examine you.

They will only consider the needs of those members of your household who are eligible to be re-housed with you, even if other people living with you have medical conditions made worse by your housing. For example, if you have an adult with medical needs living with you who would not be part of your application, they can, should they wish, apply for housing on their own, and request their own medical assessments.

They will consider all of your needs including the treatment you receive, the long term prognosis of your condition and recommend your medical priority. The decision on priority will take into account

that recommendation; however the medical priority awarded will be the final decision of the London Borough of Hounslow.

Medical priority is only awarded on the grounds that your current housing situation is having an adverse effect on your health or that of a member of your household and as a result creates a particular need for you to move.

Medical priority will not be awarded on the following grounds:

- Pregnancy – unless it is considered that your current home is adversely affecting the health of the pregnant woman and/ or the unborn child;
- Overcrowding – unless it is considered that overcrowding is adversely affecting your health or any person included on your housing application;
- Minor illnesses, such as colds, flu, sprained ankle etc;
- Poor conditions in your home, such as damp and possibly other types of disrepair;
- People who are adequately housed, such as a wheelchair user living in ground floor, single level access accommodation, which has had adaptations carried out that meet their needs; and
- A person who lives with you and suffers a medical condition but who is not included on your application for housing.

You may be awarded:

- Emergency medical priority (Band A): if you or a member of your household has a severe or life-threatening health problem and your current housing is having a significant adverse affect on your condition. This might include someone who is currently housebound because of mobility problems, or someone who needs specific equipment, facilities or adaptations which cannot be provided in their current home, and the home cannot be adapted to provide these
- Urgent medical priority (Band B): where you or a member of your household have/has a serious health problem where the current housing is having an adverse affect and your/their health may deteriorate without a move to more suitable accommodation
- Low medical priority (Band C): where you or a member of your household have/has a medical condition made worse by your current housing
- No medical priority (Band D): this does not mean you or a member of your household does not have any medical conditions, but our assessment has concluded that re-housing will not result in a significant improvement in health.

The Council's housing medical advisor and/or occupational therapist can also make specific recommendations about the type of property you need. They can recommend that you need a ground floor property, or allowing an extra bedroom because an adult or child with an illness or disability cannot share a room with their partner or another child with whom they would normally be expected to share.

We aim to complete a medical assessment within 28 days of receipt; it may take longer to complete an assessment by the occupational therapist.

If you disagree with our decision, you can ask for a review, this is explained more in [section 6.2](#).

If you or any member of your household has a change in your health condition after your application has been assessed, you should let us know. You must also tell us if you move address as we will reassess your claim for medical priority to take into account your new home.

4.2 Assessing disability and mobility needs

The Council is committed to offering people with disabilities a choice of suitable housing. Working with you, we will consider not only your disability but also the way in which your home impacts on your ability to live a full life including your social and other needs.

If you or any member of your household has a mobility, sensory or other need relating to a disability which can only be met by a move to more suitable accommodation we will take this into account with our assessment.

The Council participates in the London Affordable Housing Register (LAHR), which capture information on all adapted housing (and housing which is capable of being adapted) across London and ensure that those who need adaptations are given priority when vacancies occur.

The Council will therefore work to the definitions of adapted housing which have been agreed as the basis for the LAHR, and will categorise properties accordingly.

The mobility categories are:

- Category A wheelchair-accessible
- Category B partially wheelchair-accessible
- Category C Lifetime Homes
- Category D easy access
- Category E step-free.

Further detail on each of these categories is given in [appendix 5](#).

As there are so few adapted properties available, there can be a very long wait for accommodation. Your Housing Advisor and occupational therapist can discuss other options with you, such as adapting your home or moving to a property which is more suitable for adaptation than where you are.

Properties which fall into the categories A to C as set out above will be advertised with bidding restricted to those who have already been assessed as needing that category of property. Properties in categories D and E will be advertised with preference being given to those who need that category of property. If you are bidding for a property in categories C, D or E, it may be possible for some adaptations to be made to the property to make it more suitable for your needs but it may take some time to organise these adaptations. Your occupational therapist and housing officer can advise you about how to arrange this.

4.3 Decants: if your home is due to be demolished or refurbished

If you are a London Borough of Hounslow tenant living in a home which will be demolished as part of a regeneration programme, you will be awarded priority for a decant move (Band A). This priority will be awarded from a date 12 months before the date that demolition is due to start. You are advised to actively seek a move as soon as possible.

Before the decision to demolish your home is taken you will be consulted and a Decant Officer will meet with you to discuss the programme. Decisions on demolition are taken by Councillors or housing association management boards.

If you do not bid, or have not been successful in bidding by six months before demolition, then the Council will offer you a property which meets your needs. This will not necessarily be equivalent to the home you currently live in, for example, if you are living in a home which is larger than you need, you will be offered a new home of the appropriate size, as defined in [section 2.3](#). You will be made one reasonable offer which meets the needs of your permanent household; this is a direct offer as defined in [section 4.17](#). If you do not believe the offer is reasonable or appropriate for your needs, you may request a review as set out in [section 6.2](#).

Throughout the programme, your landlord will work with you to help you to move successfully. However, your landlord will also begin legal action for repossession of your home six months before demolition.

You may be entitled to financial payments for loss of your home, disturbance, and to meet removal expenses and the connection costs for electricity, water, gas. There is more information in our Decant Policy.

If your home is to undergo major refurbishment, which means you cannot stay in it for a period, you will be offered temporary accommodation by your landlord until you can return to it. Usually, refurbishment is carried out without asking tenants to move, but if major refurbishment works will take a significant time to complete, and will make your home unsafe to occupy whilst the work is happening, you may need to move out for a period, but you will be expected to return when the works are complete.

Any offer of temporary housing is outside of this policy and will not require you to bid through Locata.

If your current home is not suitable for your needs you can apply to be re-housed, but we cannot guarantee to re-house you before your existing home is fit for your return.

4.4 Leaving adapted homes

If you are living in a London Borough of Hounslow home which has been adapted for someone with a disability, but you do not need those adaptations, then you can be awarded urgent priority to move if we need your home for households who do need the adaptations.

Generally, we will give you urgent priority for a move if your home meets the LAHR Categories A (wheelchair-accessible) and B (partly wheelchair-accessible). We may also award you urgent priority for a move if your home meets the Category C standard (Lifetime Homes) and has had some further adaptations installed ([see appendix 5](#) for a fuller definition). We may request that an occupational therapist visits you in your current home to assess the mobility level of your property if we do not already have this information.

You will be considered for properties which are suitable for your current needs. We will review your application periodically and may reduce your banding priority if we no longer need your home.

4.5 Under-occupiers

In Hounslow, we have a very severe shortage of Council and Locata partner-owned family-sized homes. At the same time, there are many people living in family-sized homes who do not need the space. We therefore give extra priority and other help to Council or Locata partner tenants living in

Hounslow who are giving up at least a two-bedroom property to move to smaller home by awarding you Band A. To find out what size home you can move to please see [section 2.3](#).

Our Trading Places scheme may support you in planning your move, including helping you with arranging and paying for utilities connection.

For more information about the help available, London Borough of Hounslow tenants should contact their Estate Manager and Locata partner tenants should contact their landlord.

4.6 Successors whose home is too large – London Borough of Hounslow tenants only

If you have been living in a Council home for 12 months or more, which has ended with the death of the tenant you may, if the tenancy has not been succeeded before, be entitled to 'succeed to the tenancy'. This means that you may be entitled to the same security of tenure enjoyed by the person from whom you succeeded. You would be required to provide evidence that you have lived in the property for the defined period of time for us to determine whether or not you have succession rights. However, the right to succeed to the tenancy does not give you the right to remain in the property, and where it is too large for your housing need the Council may offer you an alternative property which meets your housing needs. You will be awarded Band A priority to enable you to bid for a home which meets your needs. If you do not bid, or have not bid successfully within three months, then we may make you one reasonable offer of permanent accommodation. See [section 4.17](#) for more about direct offers.

4.7 Occupiers without rights to succeed

If you are living in a Council home where the tenant has died and there has already been a succession, then you do not have the right to the tenancy of the property you are living in and may be evicted. The Council should normally give you up to six months to make alternative arrangements for your housing. You should seek alternative accommodation in the private rented sector, or you may be able to purchase a property through one of the low cost home ownership schemes.

You may apply to join the Housing Register, although this option is unlikely to provide a solution within the timescale you are given by the Council to make alternative accommodation arrangements.

4.8 Move-on from supported housing

Residents of short-term supporting people funded supported housing in the Borough may join the Housing Register if they wish to.

If you live in a Hounslow supporting people funded supported housing scheme (other than a refuge), and you are ready and able to move on into independent accommodation, your professional support worker (sometimes called a key worker) will help you to identify what options are available to you. In order to help you successfully move onto independent living and to make our supported housing available to others you could be awarded housing priority. You must have been stable in your accommodation for at least six consecutive months, have an independent living assessment and plan in place and have your application supported by the resettlement service. Your support worker will complete a move-on application form with you and they must also submit a support/care plan showing how they will support you in the first few months of your new tenancy.

Because there are more people ready to move on than there are properties available, some people will find moving into private rented housing a better option. For some people, private rented properties may be particularly suitable in allowing them to move away from areas where they have experienced difficulties in the past.

4.9 Leaving care

If you are a young person who has been in the care of the Council or for whom the Council has acted as a 'corporate parent', and you are now aged 18 or more, then your support worker can request move-on priority.

If you would benefit from continued support, your support worker will discuss supported housing options with you.

If you are ready for a tenancy of your own, your support worker should submit an Independent Living Assessment form including:

- Evidence that you are ready for independent living
- A support/care plan showing what help you will receive in the first 12 months.

Your application will be considered for leaving care status for a social tenancy. This means your application will be placed in Band B. We can advise you about other options available to you as you may want more choice of where you live.

4.10 Homelessness

If you apply to join the Council's Housing Register while you make a homeless application under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and we accept that, under this legislation, we have a duty to you your housing application will be awarded to Band C priority.

4.10.1 In temporary accommodation

We are committed to reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation; you may spend a considerable period of time in temporary accommodation if you need a larger property, or if you do not actively bid for properties.

If we have accepted a duty to re-house you permanently may offer you a private sector leased property.

This is a time-limited priority. If you do not bid, or have not bid successfully within three months of your priority date, we will make you one reasonable offer. If you make an unreasonable refusal of the direct offer, the Council will discharge its housing duty to you under s.193 (Part VII Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). You will be served with a notice to vacate the Council provided temporary accommodation, as the Council will no longer owe you a housing duty.

4.10.2 Temporary to permanent

If your temporary accommodation is owned by the Council or its partners and is suitable for your needs, the Council may offer you a secure tenancy of the property you are already living in. This will be a single offer, and if you refuse it, the Council will have discharged its duties to you and you will lose your home. You can request a review of any decision as outlined in [section 6.2](#).

4.10.3 Other homeless households

There may be people who are homeless but who have no statutory right to be housed. This will include single people and childless couples who are not considered 'vulnerable' (as set out by homelessness legislation).

Homeless households to whom the Council does not owe a statutory duty will be placed in Band C. In assessing whether or not a household is homeless, the broad principles of homelessness legislation will be applied. Evidence will be required of current (if applicable) and previous addresses, and reasons for leaving your previous accommodation.

Homeless households who have no permanent address for example: are rough sleeping, can use a 'care of' address to receive post; they can also ask to be contacted by telephone or email.

4.11 Overcrowding

You are entitled to priority for overcrowding if the property you are living in is smaller than that of the bedroom standard as set out in [section 2.3](#).

How overcrowded you are is the difference between how many bedrooms you need and how many you have. If you need one bedroom more than you have, you are overcrowded by one room. You will be awarded Band C.

If you need two or more bedrooms more than you have, you are severely overcrowded. If you are a tenant of Hounslow Council or a Locata partner housing association in the borough, and you are severely overcrowded, you will be awarded Band B. This is because we need to ensure that social housing tenants are not living in very overcrowded conditions, and we recognise that social housing tenants have limited options for arranging to move. If you are not a council or social tenant in the borough and you are severely overcrowded, you will be awarded Band C. Our housing officers can advise you on moving to other more suitable private sector accommodation.

If you choose to move to a property which is too small for you and your family or people move into your home and make it overcrowded you may be deemed to have deliberately worsened your own housing circumstances, unless you can show a good reason for this. If we are not satisfied that there were, we will take this into account in assessing your application for overcrowding.

If you are overcrowded and require a large family home, there may be a very long wait for housing. In these circumstances, if you are willing to move to a home that is smaller than you need, but would make your housing situation better, we can agree to allow you to bid for properties 1 bedroom or 2 bed spaces smaller than you need. For example, if you live in a two-bed property and need four beds, we can allow you to bid for three beds. If you are successful, you can remain on the register after your move, but your application will be reassessed to take account of your new circumstances.

Some families can feel very overcrowded yet not be overcrowded according to our definition. Typically this might be where older children are sharing rooms. The Council is committed to supporting and finding solutions for families who are overcrowded, it may take a long time to be offered a property through the housing register and many people may not be offered a property at all. It is important to consider all of the housing options available to you and your family including renting privately.

4.12 Poor housing

If you are currently living in rented accommodation (not in accommodation owned by the Council) in poor housing conditions our priority will be to bring that property up to standard through informal or formal actions with the landlord with the help of our Private Sector Housing Unit.

If necessary we may decide to inspect the property to assess the condition of your home. The current method for assessing housing conditions is a risk-based assessment process carried out

using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The purpose of the HHSRS assessment is not to set a standard but to generate objective information in order to determine and inform enforcement decisions.

The assessment is based on the risk to the potential occupant who is most vulnerable to that hazard. For example Falls Associated with Stairs and Steps constitute a greater risk to those aged over 60, so for assessing hazards relating to stairs they are considered the most vulnerable group. A dwelling that is safe for those most vulnerable is safe for all.

The Rating System is concerned with the assessment of hazards and the potential effect of those hazards, it uses a formula to generate a numerical score which is then used as the first part of the process leading to action. The action the Council would take is based on a three-stage consideration:

- (a) The hazard score determined under HHSRS.
- (b) Whether the authority, in the light of the score, has a duty or discretion to act.
- (c) The authority's judgement as to the most appropriate means of dealing with the hazard, taking account the potential and actual occupants, the Statutory Enforcement Guidance and the Council's Enforcement Policy.

It is the action that the Council would take that is relevant with regard to how suitable a property is for occupation rather than simply the hazard score.

Where a duty to act exists the courses of action available to the council are:

- Serve an improvement notice requiring remedial works;
- Make a prohibition order, which closes the whole or part of a dwelling to some or all of the occupiers (or restricts the number of permitted occupants);
- Suspend these types of notice;
- Take emergency action¹;
- Serve a hazard awareness notice;
- Make a demolition order²;
- Declare a clearance area².

¹ Not available for Category 2 hazards

² Available for Category 2 hazards only in prescribed circumstances

The most common of which are:

Improvement Notice (IMP)

An improvement notice sets out works that are required to remove or reduce a hazard and the timescales by which these works must be achieved by. This can be a suitable response where works of mitigation are both practical and appropriate.

Hazard Awareness Notice (HAN)

This response is an advisory only in nature and does not require action by the recipient of the notice. The Enforcement Guidance suggests that a HAN might be an appropriate response to a less serious Hazard or where the occupier does not wish for the works to take place due to the possible disruption.

Prohibition Order (PO)

Dependent on the circumstances POs may prohibit the use of part or all of the premises for 'some or all purposes' or prohibit 'occupation by particular numbers or descriptions of people.' This can result in the prohibition of a room, use of a facility or entire property if it is unsuitable for occupation.

The Enforcement Guidance indicate that a PO might be appropriate where the conditions present a serious threat to health or safety but where remedial action is considered unreasonable or impractical for cost or other reasons.

Emergency Action (ERA and EPO)

Local authorities have discretion to take emergency enforcement action against hazards which present an imminent risk of serious harm to occupiers. In such circumstances, authorities will themselves take remedial action to remove a hazard and recover reasonable expenses, or they will be able to prohibit the use of all or part of a property.

Emergency Action will only be considered in the most serious of cases where an imminent risk of serious harm exists in relation to a dwelling.

In specific circumstances where the Private Sector Housing serve a improvement notice, emergency prohibition order or prohibition order they can recommend priority is given on the housing register. We will take into account the likelihood of any remedial works being done, how long they were likely to take and if the effect of the Order is likely to be that the household will become homeless unless they have alternative accommodation

4.13 Welfare need to move

If you need to move to a particular locality within the district, in order to give or to receive care or support, you may be awarded Band C. To be placed in Band C, you, or the person you need to care for, will need to have an assessed need for care or support, with a care or support plan. You will also need to demonstrate that there is no one currently living with you (or with the person you need to care for) who can reasonably provide the care or support needed. In assessing the need for care and support account will also be taken of eligibility for Carers' Allowance, local transport links and the distance from your current home to the home of your carer or the person to whom you provide care.

Evidence will also be sought as to whether care can only be met by the carer providing 'live-in' care to meet the daily needs of the person requiring care. As such, an alternative to having to move to a particular part of the district might be for you and the person who needs care to seek re-housing together. Our housing officers can help you to assess whether you would have higher priority, or be able to bid for a wider choice of properties, if you did this.

4.14 Ex-service tenants

Ex-service tenants are employees or ex-employees of the Council, whom the Council has a contractual duty to re-house. The terms of that duty will be included in your contract of employment.

The council will not undertake to re-house the occupant unless his/her household fulfil the criteria of the Housing Act 1985 and they are not deemed to be intentionally homeless or where the service occupants are dismissed for misconduct; or undergo a change of employment due to promotion; or are offered alternative employment where there is no longer a need to occupy the tied accommodation for better performance of duties.

If you are living in accommodation which is needed for another employee, you will be awarded a time-limited priority. If you do not bid, or have not bid successfully within three months of your priority date, we will make you one reasonable offer. For more on direct offers, see [section 4.17](#).

4.15 Other statutory obligations

If we accept any other statutory obligation for re-housing, such as under a Closure Order or Compulsory Purchase Order, you will be awarded Band A.

This may be a time-limited priority, if there is a need to move you urgently. This will be determined by a housing manager. If you do not bid, or have not bid successfully within three months of your priority date, we will make you one reasonable offer. For more on direct offers, see [section 4.17](#).

4.16 Emergency cases and the Allocation Panel

Most people's circumstances should be described by one or more of the categories above, or, if you are assessed as not having any housing need your application will be assessed as Band D.

However, there are a small number of cases where a person's reasons for needing to move fall outside the normal categories. These are individual cases which cannot easily be defined by the normal policy.

If you think you may have an emergency need to move and you are a private tenant, you should talk to your landlord first. You should also seek help with the difficulties you are experiencing from a suitable agency – police, social services or a specialist welfare agency, depending on the situation.

If you are a tenant of a housing association or another local authority, you must report any incidents to your landlord. They have a duty of care to you and must provide with you with appropriate assistance and advice. They will investigate any incidents you report and pursue any legal action that is available to them and appropriate to the situation.

Tenants of Hounslow Council should report any difficulties they are experiencing to Hounslow Homes.

In many cases it is possible to resolve difficulties without the need to move. If you are experiencing harassment, intimidation or violence, we will support you to take action against the perpetrators rather than move, if possible.

In other cases, you may be able to organise your own move, with our help and advice. If your need to move is because of overcrowding or medical needs, you will be assessed under the main part of this policy; your application will not be referred to the Panel.

If you cannot remain in your home you may also be entitled to some assistance under the homeless rules and you should contact the Prevention and Housing Advice Team to see how they may be able to help you.

Emergency priority can be made when an urgent move is required due to exceptional circumstances usually relating to a crisis situation threatening the immediate safety of the tenant and/or family members, where a move need to be made in a planned way.

Emergency priority enables London Borough of Hounslow staff to move people in emergency situations when waiting to be housed by other means would involve high levels of risk for the applicant.

Examples of emergency priority (This list is not exhaustive)

- Victim of crime of a serious nature such as sexual assault, physical assault relating to the area and when the victim remains vulnerable by remaining in the property
- High risk of imminent danger linked to the property which can only be alleviated by an emergency move
- Traumatic event linked to the property where remaining in the property is likely to result in long term suffering of a serious possibly life threatening nature
- Management move where sensitive or difficult situations have to be managed
- Requirement for a specific type of adapted property where the move cannot be adequately managed through Locata
- Severe and ongoing harassment from neighbours when it is unlikely any other course of action will prevent further incident
- Witness to a crime which has placed the witness at risk
- Life threatening medical condition, where ongoing home medical treatment to sustain life (i.e. home dialysis) and the storage of medical equipment is essential, and bidding on Locata has failed to result in the allocation of a suitable property
- Special circumstances, e.g. a public protection panel recommends that a homeseeker or existing tenant should be excluded from bidding. The Council will make one reasonable offer, after which priority may be withdrawn.

To be considered for an award of emergency priority, your case needs to be referred by an appropriate agency, (as described earlier) or a housing officer. Housing Officers need to seek authorisation from their manager before a case can be recommended. Evidence of your needs must be provided and the reason that you should be considered above other households in housing need must be clearly demonstrated.

All applications for emergency priority are considered by the Allocations Panel.

The Allocations Panel is chaired by the Housing Register Team Leader and consists of the Housing Allocation Team Leader, the Housing Assessment/Resettlement Team Leader, a manager / team leader from Hounslow Homes, a representative from Adult Care and a representative from Children's Services (if the case requires this support) and the officers presenting a case for emergency priority, the panel will be called to met as a decision on an emergency case is required.

The Allocation panel can award emergency priority and a priority date to a case. The panel can also make recommendations of other actions which should be taken to reduce the risk to the applicant including considering other housing options which will facilitate a move more quickly than through the housing register.

If you are awarded emergency priority you will be expected to actively seek a move by bidding for available properties. If you cannot do so, you must ask someone to bid on your behalf, such as a friend, relative or support worker. If you do not have any support, a housing officer or an Estate Manager who is not involved in the allocation of permanent accommodation may be able to assist you with bidding. You will have the highest possible priority for homes, and you must actively seek properties across the Borough.

If you are bidding for yourself, and have not bid successfully by the end of 12 weeks from the date you were awarded priority, then we will review whether your priority is still required and if it is we may offer you a direct allocation.

Although you stand a good chance of being re-housed quickly with an emergency priority, it may take some time to find you a suitable property, especially if you need a larger home. Our housing officers will work with you to see if other options could meet your needs more quickly. This could include housing in the private sector. For social tenants, a mutual exchange may be a quicker solution.

4.17 Direct Allocation

There are some categories of applicants where it is important to the Council for them to be able to move in a given timescale, for example, people whose homes are due to be demolished and households in temporary accommodation, which is expensive. There may be other occasions when direct lets are used, for example, for some emergency moves or for those that need very specialist accommodation. Priority status is given on a time-limited basis only. During this period, you need to bid as actively as possible to maximise your chances of being re-housed.

If at the end of the limited period you have not bid, or have not bid successfully, we will try to make you one direct offer.

A direct offer will be a reasonable offer of a home which meets your needs in terms of size, and any needs recommended by the Council's housing medical advisor or Occupational Therapist. It may be anywhere in the Borough unless there are specific reasons (such as fleeing violence, or needing to receive care) which we have accepted as reasonably limiting where you can live.

It will be made on a single-offer basis: you will only be made one offer. You should consider this offer carefully as we will only make another offer only if the first offer was unreasonable.

If you receive a direct offer and do not believe it is reasonable, you may ask for a review, as set out in [section 6.2](#). A manager will investigate your case, and check whether the property is suitable for your needs. If it is not suitable, we will accept your refusal, and reinstate your priority and you will be made another direct offer.

If you refuse the offer and do not request a review within the requisite timescales or if we review the offer and decide it was suitable, then we will not make you any further direct offers. You will lose your additional priority. If your home is due to be demolished, your landlord may take legal action and you may lose your home.

If you are homeless and in temporary accommodation, you have a statutory right to a review of the suitability of the accommodation. If we decide it is suitable, we will have discharged our duty to you and you will lose your accommodation.

4.18 Domestic Abuse

Domestic violence can come in many forms; it is 'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.' (Domestic Violence - A National Report, the Home Office 2005). If you are suffering domestic violence or domestic abuse we will work with you to try to identify the best housing solution for you.

You can seek assistance from or contact any local authority in the UK if you are fleeing domestic violence. If you feel you will be in further danger by staying in the borough you are living in you can move to another.

Depending on your circumstances, we may be able to support you to remain in your current home, whilst excluding the perpetrator.

If you have moved to a refuge as a result of domestic violence, the refuge workers will support you in looking for alternative accommodation, when you are ready to move.

We will assess your need for re-housing under the terms of the rest of this policy (medical need, homelessness, etc).

4.19 Harassment and anti-social behaviour

If you are suffering from harassment or anti-social behaviour from neighbours or others, the Council will try to work with you to sort out the problems without you having to move. The Council takes anti-social behaviour very seriously and there are a range of legal remedies that can be sought, as well as mediating to try to resolve less serious issues.

4.20 Housing for older people

Some accommodation is designed especially for older people, and will be advertised with age restrictions.

4.20.1 Sheltered housing

Sheltered accommodation is designated for tenants aged 60 years or over. Sheltered accommodation is generally self-contained, although some sheltered units have shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. There are usually some communal facilities such as a room for social and leisure activities. Sheltered accommodation is managed by a sheltered scheme manager who may be resident on site or visit on a regular basis. Sheltered accommodation is suitable for older persons who have support needs due to age, increasing frailty and/or ill health, but are capable of independent living with only a low level of assistance from care/support services.

As there is some support provided, which is funded by the Supporting People programme, we can allocate sheltered housing only to applicants who have support needs that meet the Supporting People criteria.

If you or your partner is aged 60 or over you must indicate on your housing application that you are interested in moving to sheltered housing. We will contact you to arrange a home visit, for us to complete a [Sheltered Housing Assessment Form](#). We will need to look at who else is part of your household – we may not be able to offer you sheltered housing if there are younger members of the household wishing to move with you.

All applications for sheltered housing are considered by the Sheltered Housing Panel which will:

- determine whether you are eligible for sheltered housing
- assign you a priority band in accordance with this policy.

The Sheltered Housing Panel is made up of staff from the Allocation Team, Hounslow Homes and Older People's Services Occupational Therapy team. The Sheltered Housing Panel meets on a fortnightly basis.

If you are already living in sheltered accommodation and seeking a move, you will normally be assigned Band D, unless your property does not meet your needs, e.g. mobility needs.

The Panel can consider exceptional cases, such as people in need of sheltered accommodation who do not meet the age criteria but who are approaching 60 years of age.

4.20.2 If you own your own home

If you own your own home and wish to move to sheltered accommodation, the Sheltered Housing Panel can consider an application. We will require financial information including an independent valuation of your property to help us to decide whether you would be able to secure sheltered housing in the private sector. If you can afford private sheltered housing you will be placed in Band D.

4.20.3 Very sheltered housing

Hounslow has some very sheltered housing which offers a high level of specific extra care on a 24-hour basis to people aged 60 or over who are unable to live independently. The properties are one-bed self-contained and adapted flats.

If you think you may need very sheltered housing, you should first discuss this with your social worker or care worker if you have one. Your application will initially be assessed by the Sheltered Housing Panel. Your care needs would then be assessed by the Long-term Care Panel in adult/older people's services.

4.20.4 Housing for older people without support

Older person's dwellings (OPD) are homes that are reserved for older applicants who can live independently (there is no support provided). The properties are generally in low-rise blocks and are one-bed or bed-sit units with self-contained facilities. Flats and bed-sits within an older person's dwelling scheme are designated for homeseekers and transfers, who must be aged 50 or over; one-bed and bed-sit bungalows are designated for homeseekers and transfers who must be aged 55 or over.

If you want to bid for OPD's, you may do so if you meet the age criteria. If you are making a joint application and only one of you meets the age criteria, your application will be determined by the Allocation Team Leader.

Some units will require prospective tenants to have good mobility as many units are in low-rise blocks, on the first or second floor without lift access.

Some OPD's have adapted bathroom facilities, and may have scope to be adapted further. These will be assessed against the mobility criteria, and the mobility level will be clearly indicated on any advert, as for other properties suitable for disabled persons.

4.21 Scheme-specific and local lettings plans

Normally, allocations will be on the basis of priority bands, but in some special circumstances, such as when we are regenerating a large area, we may use different criteria called a local lettings scheme or a scheme-specific plan.

The Council and its partners will introduce local lettings plans where this will benefit the sustainability of local communities and/or where this will alleviate other social and economic pressures. They will include specific aims such as developing a mixed and inclusive community and offering affordable housing for rent. It may include specific targets such as balancing support

needs, managing child density and to deal with concentrations of deprivation or to create more mixed communities by setting aside a proportion of vacancies for applicants who are employed. Quota systems may be negotiated within lettings plans to provide for specific requirements, such as the homeless, or move on accommodation from specialist provision.

When we advertise properties affected by a scheme-specific plan or a local lettings plan, we will say so clearly on the advert.

When a scheme-specific plan or a local lettings plan applies, we may give priority to people from lower bands if they meet the required criteria, and if there are no people in greater need who meet the criteria.

For example, when we are regenerating a large area, it is important to make sure that the newly refurbished homes are let to a mixture of different people, so that they can settle to form a good community. It would not be a good idea if they were all occupied by people with one type of need, or all with children of similar ages. In these circumstances we will specify criteria to ensure we get a mix of people. We may also give priority to people who previously lived in the area and had to move for the regeneration to take place.

We may give priority for some newly built one- and two-bed properties to under-occupiers moving from family homes. This is because new homes are easy to maintain and may be more attractive to elderly people who have been in their current home for a long time, and because we want to encourage such people to move so that family homes become available.

Other criteria may include supporting people to move to an area because they are in employment there, or have been offered employment there. We would only use this criterion in an area with a higher than average level of unemployment, and only for up to 25% of lettings in that area.

For more about local lettings schemes see [section 4.21](#).

4.22 Quota Arrangements

We may seek to use quota arrangements to meet a particular housing need or strategic aim of the organisation.

It is intended that the policy will meet the housing needs of those groups which the organisation is required to give preference to or for those who it needs to give priority to strategically. If the policy is not meeting the needs of a particular group as set out in our allocation plan then we may use quota arrangements to directly advertise properties to a particular group. The groups of people to which we may initiate quota arrangements include; accepted homeless household, to meet the need of moving homeless households in temporary accommodation and customers wishing to transfer from a Hounslow Homes property in order to provide mobility within our social housing stock.

When nomination rights exist the London Borough of Hounslow reserve the right to seek quota arrangements with the aim of offering an alternative to the open bidding system.

In order for the Housing Allocation Policy to be as transparent as possible, quota arrangements will only be used where there is an urgent and evidenced need which will be detailed in our Allocation Plan which cannot be met directly through our allocation policy.

Chapter 5: How to bid

You can find out about properties that are available in the fortnightly free magazine called Locata HOME.

Where possible, the advert will show a photograph and include information about the landlord, the rent, what sort of property it is (floor level, type, how many bedrooms), the area it is in, the size of household that can apply and if it is most suitable for certain types of households (e.g. age restrictions or mobility criteria).

The advert will say if any special criteria apply, for example under a local lettings plan.

We will try to ensure that all the information in our adverts is correct. However, if a property has not been described accurately in an advert we may withdraw the property and re-advertise it correctly.

You can access Locata HOME at housing offices, libraries, and social services offices. You can also find out about available properties online, on www.locata.org.

If you cannot collect Locata HOME and cannot access the internet, you can subscribe to the magazine for a small fee.

You should look for properties which meet your needs. This means properties which are the council. The more actively you bid for properties, the greater your chance of being re-housed.

5.1 Bidding

You can make bids online, by telephone, text message or coupon. There is more information about how to bid in the Locata scheme user guide included in the registration pack.

It is advisable to do some research into the area of the property advertised before you bid for it as there is less chance of you refusing an offer if you are aware that the local amenities and transport links are not an issue for you or your household. You could do this by looking at an up to date street map and would not necessarily have to visit the area.

5.1.1 If you need help to bid

Anyone can bid on your behalf, so long as they have your Locata Identification Number (LIN) and your permission to do so. This could be family members, friends, social workers or others who are supporting you.

The Council's Allocation Officers cannot bid on behalf of any members due to the Council's audit requirements. Our other housing officers or Hounslow Homes staff responsible for managing transfer applications may bid on behalf of applicants in exceptional circumstances only, for example, in the event that the member is unable to bid due to a language difficulty or disability and does not have any other support to provide assistance. The officer must seek approval from their team leader prior to submitting bids and the member must provide written consent authorising a Council or Hounslow Homes officer to submit bids on their behalf.

You will need your Locata Identification Number (LIN) to bid, and in any enquiries about bidding. For enquiries made by telephone, specific security details may be requested from the caller, even if the LIN has been quoted, due to the Data Protection Act 1998, the LIN cannot be given via the telephone. A letter confirming your LIN and other registration details will be sent to the address that is current on the Council's housing database.

5.2 Guidelines for making eligible bids

You can make up to three bids every cycle – that is, every fortnight, from each edition of Locata HOME.

To bid for a property, you must be registered on our Housing Register, unless the property is advertised on the cross-borough pages, where you would need to be registered with one of our Locata partners.

If you are registered on Hounslow's Housing Register, you can bid for properties advertised by Hounslow on the Hounslow pages of Locata HOME. You can only bid for properties in other boroughs if they are advertised on the cross-borough pages.

You should also make sure that your bids are eligible. If you make ineligible bids you will not be considered for the properties for which you have bid.

For your bid to be eligible, you must:

- be on the Housing Register. Your application must not have been cancelled or deferred
- not be considering another offer already. Making a provisional offer to a member makes all other bids from that member ineligible whilst the offer is being made and you view the property. A person who is eligible for more than one property may be considered for another offer at the Council's discretion. However a second offer will be on a reserve basis
- bid before the deadline
- not submit more than three bids from any edition of Locata HOME. If you submit more than three bids, some will be discarded at random, without verifying which are eligible
- bid for properties which are the right size for your assessed needs. They should meet the number of bedrooms you are eligible for as set out in [section 2.3](#) and as notified to you with your registration details. Your household should have at least the minimum number of persons, and usually no more than the maximum number of persons stated. However, if you are overcrowded and require a large family home you can choose to bid for properties that are one bedroom smaller than they need. Other than this, if you bid for a property which is too small or too large for your needs, your bid will be ineligible
- meet the age requirement for the property, if there is one
- not have rent arrears of more than six weeks' rent, if you are a Council or Locata partner tenant, unless you have an arrangement to pay and have been paying regularly for at least six months. This does not automatically apply to under-occupiers on the Trading Places scheme, if the rent balance can be cleared from the incentive payment
- meet the mobility needs criteria, if the property is advertised in categories A to C (if a property is advertised with a mobility level D or E, preference will be given to applicants who have been assessed as needing that mobility level).

5.3 What happens after bidding closes?

When the bids are received for a property they are placed in order of priority to produce a list of eligible applicants. Priority is awarded firstly on the basis of priority band, then local connection and then on priority date, that is the date that you were awarded that band.

We will then verify the bids we have received and invite the highest priority bidders to view the property.

If your bid is successful, we will contact you quickly. We will contact you by telephone or text if we can, as we need to arrange a viewing with you as soon as possible. This is because if you do not

accept the property we could offer it to someone else. We do not contact you if your bid is not shortlisted in the top ten bidders and unfortunately we are unable to provide you with direct feedback on the success of your bids. You can check the progress of your bids by logging onto www.locata.org using your LIN. Alternatively, each edition of Locata HOME provides feedback on successful bids from previous editions.

5.4 Priority Band order

An applicant from a higher band will take priority over applicants from lower bands, so a Band A applicant takes priority over a Band B applicant.

Properties will be offered to applicants based on the following priorities:

1. Priority Banding
2. Local Connection
3. Priority date (when registration into the highest priority band took place)

Sometimes, properties may be advertised with specific criteria attached; as determined by a local lettings plan, for specialist accommodation such as sheltered accommodation or housing available only to certain groups. This will be made clear on the advertisement. In these cases, priority would be given to an applicant from a lower band who meets the criteria, rather than an applicant from a higher band who does not meet the criteria.

5.5 Verification of status

If you are shortlisted, your application will need to be verified to make sure you are eligible for an allocation, that your details are correct, current and that the circumstances for which you have claimed housing priority for are still the same and legitimate. If we are unable to verify your application with you or your details are not correct, your bid will be rejected. We will give you 24 hours to respond to a request for a verification visit.

Verification will usually involve a home visit to your current residence. All members in Bands A and B will be visited shortly after the band is awarded unless their circumstances have already been verified following a homelessness investigation and they have been shortlisted for an offer within 12 months of this verification.

Any member who makes a successful bid (except where homelessness has been investigated and accepted) may be visited before an offer of accommodation is confirmed. The visits will be conducted, as appropriate, by Allocation Officers, Homeless Assessment Officers, and Temporary Accommodation Officers or in the case of applications received from tenants of housing associations or another Council, the appropriate housing officers from these organisations will be asked to verify your application and circumstances. Verifications visits to tenants of Hounslow Council who have been shortlisted for an offer will be carried out by appropriate officers at Hounslow Homes.

All members, including tenants of Hounslow Council, will be required to provide the following documents before an application can be verified:

- a) Proof of identity – for all persons included on the application
- b) Proof of eligibility – see [appendix 1](#) – for the main and joint applicant only
- c) Proof of address for the past five years for the main and joint applicant only.

In addition, you may be asked to provide evidence that you are the main carer for your children, or that you are providing care or support to someone. Normally this would mean evidence that you are in receipt of Child Benefits or Carer's Allowance.

If requested, the original documents need to be submitted to the Housing Department, in person, within a specified timescale.

5.5.1 Viewing properties

We will invite the top bidders to view a property. We may invite up to ten bidders to a viewing.

If you have mobility or disability needs, your OT may view the property before it is offered to you or may attend the viewing with you to consider any adaptations which may be needed. We will tell you where you are ranked in the top ten.

To make sure we let properties as quickly as we can, you may be asked to view a home where repairs are still underway. You will be told what repairs will be completed before you move in.

We cannot offer you a property until we have verified your application. If your application has not been verified before you are invited to view a property, we will ask you for the proofs required to verify it. You will only have 24 hours to provide those proofs.

When we invite you to view a property, we will ask you to make a decision quickly about if you would like to accept the property, either whilst you are viewing it or within 24 hours of the viewing, if we do not hear from you within this time we will assume you have refused it. If you are unable to confirm acceptance of an offer within this timescale, due to extenuating circumstances, you or someone you have arranged to act on your behalf should let us know so we can agree when you will make a decision.

5.5.2 Refusals

If you refuse an offer of accommodation we will, after judging the suitability of the offer, review your banding to consider whether your existing priority still reflects your current housing need.

There may be other consequences of refusing a property such as if we have accepted a homeless duty towards you and you refuse a suitable offer we will discharge our statutory duty to you, you will lose your temporary accommodation and your band priority will be lost.

5.6 Feedback about properties which have been let

We do not publish information about who has been allocated a particular home. However, we know that it can be helpful if you have not been successful to be given certain information regarding the successful applicants to give you a better understanding of your chances of being re-housed from the Housing Register.

For each letting, we will tell you what band the successful applicant was in and how long they had been in that band. This information will be published in each edition of Locata HOME and is available online.

Someone else may be re-housed more quickly than you if their application is in a higher band than yours. Also, some properties receive more bids than others, either because there is particular demand for that area or block, or because that property type is in high demand.

Chapter 6: Who to contact for further advice or if you disagree with our decision

6.1 Who to contact for further advice, or if you want to make a complaint

- For advice about your housing options, contact Housing Needs on 020 8583 2000
- If you think you may become homeless, contact our Prevention & Housing Advice Service on 020 8583 2000
- If you are a Hounslow Council tenant who wants to join the Housing Register, you should contact Hounslow Homes on 0800 085 6575
- If you want to join the Housing Register and you are not already a tenant of Hounslow Council go to the housing pages on www.hounslow.gov.uk
- We welcome feedback on the service you have received. Information about how to make a complaint or to offer a compliment is included in [appendix three](#).

6.2 What to do if you disagree with our decisions

Under s160 (A) (9) and s.167 (4A) (b) (d), of the Housing Act (1996) a housing authority must notify you in writing of any decision:

- to treat you as ineligible by virtue of s160A (3) or (5) (i.e. persons from abroad),
- to treat you as ineligible because of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him unsuitable to be a Council or housing association tenant,
- not to give you any preference under the scheme because of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make you unsuitable to be a tenant of the housing authority.

We must give clear grounds for our decision, which must be based on firmly on the relevant facts of the case. You have the right to request a review and to be informed of the decision of the review and the grounds for it.

By virtue of s.166 (2) of the Housing Act (1996), we must inform you that you have the right to a review of a decision set out in s.1674A and the right to be informed of any decision about the facts of your case.

6.2.1 Formal reviews

You can request a review must be submitted in writing using the “review request form”. You must tell us which decision you would like to be reviewed and any new evidence that should be considered since the original decision was made.

When a review of a banding decision is requested you will be asked to provide evidence to show reasons why you believe you should be in a different band according to this policy.

You can request a reviewing for the following decisions:

- not to register someone on the housing register, exclude them from bidding or removing someone from the housing register other than at your request,
- that you are ineligible for an offer,

- about another decisions relating to the housing register and housing allocations policy, including banding and priority dates.

An officer not directly involved in making the original decision will carry out your review.

A request for a review must be made within 21 days from the day on which you are notified of our decision and the reasons for it. The Council has discretion to extend the time limit if it considers this would be reasonable.

The officer investigating the case will do so in accordance with internal procedures and taking careful note of relevant legislative requirements, statutory instruments and the prevailing code of guidance. If not already received they will invite the applicant to make written representations or, if the applicant is unable to do this or would be disadvantaged by this method, the reviewing officer may hear oral representation. In some cases both written and oral representations may be allowed and the applicant may appoint someone to act on their behalf in making them.

In reviewing a decision on ineligibility for an offer the reviewing officer will determine, where appropriate, whether you have remedied the reason for the ineligibility being imposed.

If the reviewing officer finds that the officer who took the decision did not take relevant information into account they will refer the file back to that officer for re-consideration of their original decision as part of the review process.

The officer will notify the applicant of their decision within eight weeks of the request for a review (although this time limit may be extended by agreement with the applicant).

6.2.2 Appeals

You have the right of appeal regarding any decision made about their application.

Requests for an appeal of a decision made by a council officer must be made in writing within 21 days of you becoming aware of the decision. Assistance in preparing appeals can be provided by independent advice agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau or Shelter. A senior officer who was not involved in making the original decision will consider the appeal.

Once the final decision is made the applicant will be notified in writing with the reasons for the decision. If you are still not happy with the final decision following the appeal process, then you may appeal to the County Court on a point of law.

You also have the right to appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman if they consider the Council has not acted within its stated policies or within the legislation. Advice regarding this may be obtained from the Citizens Advice Bureau or Shelter.

An appeal once complete will only be reviewed again on submission of evidence of a change of circumstance. Once an appeals process has taken place no further reviews will be considered until new evidence has been received.

PART C: USEFUL LINKS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

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Appendix 1: Documents acceptable to prove eligibility and immigration status

For proof of right to reside in the UK, and the right to benefit from government help:

- If you have a valid British passport and reside in the UK – your passport
- If you do not have a valid British passport, but have a British birth certificate (or naturalisation certificate) please provide this certificate PLUS proof of your identity, such as a driving licence, other photo-ID card, or two proofs of address
- If you have a valid EEA passport (except Cyprus and Malta) or a passport from Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Czech Republic, please provide this plus proof that you or your partner are working. (EEA countries are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden). Proof of work includes at least two recent and consecutive payslips, or a letter of confirmation from your employer
- If you are a national of any country not listed above, you should provide a valid passport with appropriate visa and/or Home Office letter showing that the bearer is eligible for recourse to public funds.

The list of documents above is not exhaustive. The London Borough of Hounslow assesses eligibility in accordance with legislation set out by the government. Rules regarding eligibility change regularly. These changes will determine the criteria we use and the documents we require to assess eligibility.

Appendix 2: Current applicable income and savings limits as at 1/4/09

If you have sufficient financial resources to resolve your own housing difficulties, you will be awarded Band D only (see [section 2.5](#)).

We define sufficient financial resources as:

- Household income greater than £60,000.

And/or

- Savings greater than £20,000.

If you own a property, or a share in a property, and the value of your share is greater than £20,000, and you are under 60 years of age, then you will be assessed as having sufficient financial resources and placed in Band D. If you are aged 60 or over you may still be eligible for sheltered housing if you also have a support need. For more information, see [section 4.20](#)

If you own a share in a property but are unable to live there, for example, if your relationship has broken down, then we will assess your financial circumstances on the basis of the money that could reasonably be expected to be released if the property were sold. Thus if the property is worth £200,000, there is an outstanding mortgage of £100,000 and you owned the property jointly with one other person, we would assume that you had access to £50,000. If you had no other savings, and your income was less than £60,000, we would not assume that you had sufficient financial resources to meet your own housing need.

Appendix 3: Complaints procedure

If you are not happy with a decision the Council has made about your housing application, you should ask for a review of that decision.

If you want to complain about the service you have received you should send your complaint in writing to:

Housing Complaints Officer
Housing Strategy & Services
London Borough of Hounslow, Civic Centre
Lampton Road
Hounslow
TW3 4DN

You can also send an email to housing.customerservices@hounslow.gov.uk or phone on 020 8583 4245.

Hounslow Council operates a three-stage complaints procedure:

- Stage 1 – the manager of the service you have complained about will investigate your complaint and send you a written response detailing the findings of the investigation within 10 working days.

If your complaint is complex and we cannot complete an investigation within ten days, we will write to you to tell you when you can expect a response.

If you are not happy with the outcome of the stage 1 complaint or you do not believe that we have investigated your complaint fully, you may make ask for your complaint to be investigated at stage 2.

- Stage 2 – your complaint will be investigated by the Housing Complaints Officer, who will send you a written response, detailing the findings of the investigation, within ten working days.

If your complaint is complex and we cannot complete an investigation in ten days, we will write to you to tell you when you can expect a response.

- Stage 3 – Members' Panel – if you are not satisfied with the outcome of the stage 2 investigation, or do not believe that your complaint has been investigated fully, you may ask for your complaint to be reviewed by a Panel of three elected Councillors.

You can either write to the Housing Complaints Officer or phone on 020 8583 4245 to ask for your complaint to be reviewed at stage 3. The Complaints Officer will send you a form to complete and return as well as guidance notes explaining the stage 3 complaints process.

If, after Stage 3 investigation, you are still not satisfied, you should contact the Local Government Ombudsman. We will tell you how to do this.

You can find more information about the Council's complaints procedures on the London Borough of Hounslow website at www.hounslow.gov.uk, or by phoning 020 8583 4245.

Appendix 4: List of current partners

These partners are current at time of going to press:

- 1 London Borough of Brent.
- 2 London Borough of Ealing.
- 3 London Borough of Harrow.
- 4 London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham.
- 5 London Borough of Hillingdon.
- 6 London Borough of Hounslow.
- 7 Acton Housing Association.
- 8 Catalyst Communities Housing Association.
- 9 PCHA Housing Association.
- 10 Paradigm Housing Group.
- 11 Shepherds Bush Housing Association.
- 12 Stadium Housing Association.
- 13 Thames Valley Housing Association.
- 14 Notting Hill Housing.
- 15 Westway Housing Association.

Please refer to the current issue of the Locata Scheme User Guide for an up-to-date list of partner organisations.

Locata (Housing Services) Limited, the partnership's central lettings agency, publishes the fortnightly freesheet and updates and manages the administration of Locata HOME. The central lettings agency cannot be contacted directly: all partners within the scheme deal with related queries and complaints from members on their respective Housing Register.

Appendix 5: Housing for people with a disability

The Council is committed to offering people with a physical or sensory disability the greatest possible choice of suitable housing. In working with you to meet your needs, we will consider not only your medical condition, but also the way in which your home impacts on your ability to live a full life including social and other needs. The Council will participate in the London Affordable Housing Register, which aims to capture information on all adapted housing (and housing which is capable of being adapted) across London and ensure that those who need adaptations are given priority when vacancies occur.

The Council will therefore work to the draft definitions of adapted housing which have been agreed as the basis for the LAHR, and will categorise properties accordingly. When we are assessing the needs of a person with a disability, we will agree with them which classification(s) of property are most suited to those needs, in order to assist them to bid for the most appropriate housing. Any person with a disability who is bidding for a home will have timely access to advice to assist them to decide whether the home will meet their requirements.

The property classifications are:

Category A – wheelchair-accessible and Category B – partially wheelchair-accessible

'Wheelchair housing' built in the 1970s and 1980s has lower space and other standards than wheelchair-accessible housing built today. Only housing built to the National Wheelchair Housing Association group standards (which were largely incorporated into the Housing Corporation's scheme development standards in 1997, updated 2006) will be included as Category A, fully wheelchair-accessible. Properties built earlier or to lower standards will be classified as Category B, partially wheelchair-accessible.

In making the judgement as to whether a property falls into Category A or B, reference should be made to the Housing Corporation Design and Quality Standards.

From the point of view of the person with a disability, Category A properties will have wider doorways and corridors, suitable for a motorised wheelchair, full access to all rooms and facilities in the property, and better access to parking and external spaces. Most people who use a motorised wheelchair all of the time indoors will require a Category A property. People who use a wheelchair indoors for only part of the time, or who use a manually propelled wheelchair indoors, may be suitable for a Category B property.

Category C – Lifetime Homes

Lifetime Homes are ordinary homes which have been designed to be easier to adapt as needed. Lifetime Homes cannot necessarily be adapted to accommodate a full-time wheelchair user, but may be appropriate for someone who uses a wheelchair out of doors but not indoors. Lifetime Homes can be adapted for those with limited mobility, and may be suitable for people whose mobility is likely to become more restricted in future.

Category D – Easy access

Easy access housing is housing with wider corridors and doorways and level access. Homes that met the old Housing Corporation mobility standards would fall into this category, as would any homes built to Part M of the building regulations (1999) on the ground floor or with lift access.

Easy access properties are designed to enable a wheelchair user to visit the property, but not to live there permanently. Easy access properties would be suitable for people with limited mobility.

Category E – step-free

Step-free housing is housing which has not been built to a particular design standard, but which does have a level access approach and no steps to get into the property. If there are steps inside the property these would have to be capable of taking a basic stairlift. Step-free housing is suitable for people with some mobility problems.

Advertising properties suitable for people with a disability

All properties which fall into any of the above categories will be advertised for restricted bidding only to those who have already been assessed as needing this category of housing.

The limitations of advertising space mean it will not be possible to include information about all existing adaptations within the advert, and bidders will be encouraged to contact Housing officers to get more information about the property before placing a bid. Support will be available from an occupational therapist or other support worker to assist people to decide if a property is suitable for their needs.

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