

# **Ashford Borough Council's Housing Allocation Scheme**

Rules for allocating social rented housing

2026

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## 1. Purpose of the policy

- 1.1. The allocation of social rented housing supports Ashford Borough Council's broader strategic approach to housing in the borough. In this document, 'we', 'us' or 'our' will always refer to Ashford Borough Council, unless otherwise stated.
- 1.2. We will allocate social rented housing by following the policy and procedure set out in this Housing Allocation Scheme. Decisions about the allocation of social rented housing shall be taken by officers acting under delegated our constitution. The criteria as set out in Part 6 Housing Act 1996 (as amended) has also been fully considered, as this is the primary legislation regarding how allocations of social rented housing should be made.
- 1.3. We are a provider of social rented housing and information on our social rented housing properties can be viewed on the [Kent Homechoice](#) website. The Regulator of Social Housing has a set of regulatory standards known as the Consumer Standards, that contain specific expectations that social landlords must comply with and the outcomes that landlords are expected to achieve. Under the Tenancy Standard, landlords should ensure that they allocate and let homes in a fair and transparent way that supports local housing need. This scheme enables us to achieve the outcomes of this requirement in relation to our own housing stock.
- 1.4. Social rented housing is a low-cost rental property, which is let at below the market rate. Offers of this type of housing are made to people who qualify for an allocation under this scheme.
- 1.5. We will allocate the following types of social rented housing:
  - a. General needs housing- This the most common type of social rented housing. It can be allocated to any person with a need for social rented housing, or
  - b. Supported housing- This type of social rented housing has special design facilities, or features for specific persons requiring support, for example, housing designed for older people
- 1.6. Social rented properties can have different rental amounts. We will allocate the following types of housing:

- a. Social rented housing, let at a social rent rate. This is the most common type of rent and it is set in accordance with a national formula that takes account various factors, or
  - b. Affordable rented housing. Where the rent to be paid by tenants can be no more than 80% of the market value of the property, or
  - c. Intermediate rent housing. Often part of a specific named scheme, rent must not exceed 80% of the current market rate. The reduced rent is an opportunity for the tenant to save towards a deposit for buying their own home. There may also be a future opportunity to purchase all, or a share of, the property currently being rented.
- 1.7. This scheme sets out how households can apply to join our housing register, how decisions will be made about applications, and the procedure to be followed when a review of a decision is requested.
- 1.8. The primary purpose of the housing register is to ensure that social rented housing in Ashford is prioritised to those most in need, whilst also considering the limited availability of this type of housing in Ashford. We recognise the needs of our local residents, and this document sets out how and when those who live, work and are connected to the borough of Ashford will be able to join the housing register. We are committed to making sure tenancies are sustainable, and that communities are settled, viable and inclusive. Except in exceptional circumstances or those specified within this document, we will make properties available through a choice-based lettings system. This will allow households wherever possible to express their preference on the type of home they might be offered.
- 1.9. We will allocate social rented housing by setting qualifying criteria in this Housing Allocation Scheme, which sets out who can join the housing register, as well as the relative priority they will be given. Allocations may be for an offer of social rented housing owned by us, or by a registered provider of social rented housing within the borough.
- 1.10. We will also set out the circumstances where we will decide an existing tenant or licensee becomes a secure tenant.
- 1.11. Registered providers are required to have rules explaining how they will prioritise people for an allocation of social rented housing, which can be found on their individual websites.

- 1.12. This scheme also sets out how we will allocate properties to existing tenants seeking to transfer to alternative housing.
- 1.13. We will make objective decisions about the allocation of social rented housing. Information on what social rented housing we allocate will be published on the Kent Homechoice website. We are committed to allocating social rented housing as quickly as possible. We will therefore advertise available homes on any day of the week to minimise void periods and reduce waiting times wherever possible.
- 1.14. We will regularly carry out an analysis of our housing register to check the type of households who are applying for housing, and what additional support needs they may have. We will also carry out consultation with existing tenants and those on the housing register to establish if this scheme meets the needs of households who require housing.
- 1.15. We will support people to explore all of their housing options by providing advice, including where appropriate to remain at home via adaptations, assistance with safety schemes, access to the private rented market, home ownership etc.
- 1.16. Social rented housing that is intended for households with specific needs (e.g. accessible housing, older persons housing, etc) will be allocated to households that have a need for this type of housing.
- 1.17. We will make sure that language and interpretation assistance is available for people who have difficulty speaking or reading English, and information shall be made available in alternative formats (e.g. Braille, audio, large print).
- 1.18. We will refer and adhere to statutory guidance published by the UK Government when reviewing and amending this scheme, and when making decisions about policy and practice.
- 1.19. We remain committed to ensuring that we make best use of our housing, alongside our strategic plans to support local development in order to make available housing for those who need it in our borough.
- 1.20. We have proudly signed up to the armed forces covenant and have provided commitments in this document to ensure support for Armed Forces Personnel and their families is available where they are required to leave accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence, and need to secure a new home.

## 2. Other policies outside of the Housing Allocation Scheme

- 2.1. Management moves undertaken by us due to stock investment, asset management, tenancy or estate management reasons, are not covered by this scheme. Our Management Moves Policy can be viewed on our website.
- 2.2. Decisions made by us about the renewal of a flexible tenancy at the same social rented house, are not covered by this scheme. Information about the renewal of flexible tenancies can be viewed on our website.
- 2.3. Opportunities for our tenants to exchange their tenancy with another tenant are not covered by this scheme. Our Mutual Exchange Policy can be viewed on our website.
- 2.4. Decisions made by us about introductory and secure tenancies, relating to succession, devolution or assignment of a tenancy following the death of a tenant, assignment by exchange of a tenancy, transfer of a tenancy from one tenant to another or court orders requiring a transfer of a tenancy, are not covered by this scheme. Information about such matters, can viewed on our website.
- 2.5. The management of decants from Ashford Borough Council owned housing is not covered by this scheme. For more information about the management of decants, our Decant Policy can be viewed on our website.

### 3. Eligibility for an allocation of social housing

- 3.1. We can only allocate social rented housing to people who have a right to live in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Isle of Mann, and the Channel Islands who are habitually resident in the UK.
- 3.2. Section 160ZA Housing Act 1996 (as amended) details who is a qualifying person for an allocation of social housing. As such, we are not allowed to allocate social rented housing to:
  - a. Persons from abroad who are subject to immigration control, unless they are a prescribed person as provided in regulations by the Secretary of State
  - b. Persons from abroad who are not subject to immigration control but who are restricted from being allocated social housing due to relevant regulations
  - c. Persons from abroad who are not entitled to Universal Credit or Housing Benefit (regardless as to whether or such persons would make a claim for Universal Credit or Housing Benefit).
- 3.3. Our tenants are exempt from eligibility rules, and so we will not consider this when an application for a transfer is made.
- 3.4. If we decide a person is not eligible for an allocation of social rented housing, the applicant will be provided with an explanation as to how this decision was made. Decisions will usually be made in writing via the online portal account made available to individuals during the application process to join the housing register.
- 3.5. We will undertake a second check in respect of eligibility in the event that a person has been or is likely to be successful for an offer of social rented accommodation.
- 3.6. In considering who is eligible for an offer of social rented housing, we will rely on evidence from an applicant to demonstrate that a restriction as defined in paragraph 3.2 above does not apply.
- 3.7. Where a person withdraws their application for social rented housing, we will not continue an assessment for the purposes of eligibility, as the application will be removed.

- 3.8. We are committed to ensuring that employees responsible for making decisions about eligibility for an allocation of social rented housing shall be provided with relevant training about housing allocation law and practice.
- 3.9. We will also inform all persons that if their immigration status changes, then their right to remain on the housing register may be impacted.
- 3.10. Where a person has previously been refused entry to the housing register due to being ineligible, but whose immigration status has now changed, they may make a further application. We will consider on the new application any additional information or evidence provided in order to establish that they are now eligible for an allocation of social rented housing.



## 4. Non-qualifying persons

- 4.1. We will only allocate social rented housing to people who satisfy the qualifying criteria set out below. Where applicable, qualifying criteria also extends to a person's usual household members.
- 4.2. Where a decision is made that a person does not qualify to join the housing register, we will notify the applicant explaining reasons for the decision via their online portal account. A decision about whether or not someone is a qualifying person, will be made at the time of initial application, and again when considering making an allocation.
- 4.3. Where an individual has previously been refused entry to the housing register due to being a non-qualifying person, but whose circumstances have now changed, they may make a further application. We will consider on the new application any additional information or evidence provided in order to establish that they are now qualifying for an allocation of social rented housing.

### Capacity to hold a tenancy

- 4.4. A person is not a qualifying person if they are incapable of holding a tenancy agreement, due to being:
  - a. Aged under 18 years old; or
  - b. Aged 16 years old, who are looked after children owed a section 20 duty by Kent County Council; or
  - c. Not having the mental capacity to hold a tenancy.
- 4.5. Exceptions apply to people who are incapable of holding a tenancy agreement, when they are:
  - a. Aged 16 or 17 years or age, but have a suitable guarantor (e.g. Kent County Council's Children Services) that can hold a tenancy on their behalf until they are aged 18 years, or
  - b. Aged over 18 years lacking mental capacity, but have a suitable guarantor (e.g. Kent County Council's Adults Social Care Service) who can hold a tenancy on their behalf.

## Behaviour

- 4.6. A person is not a qualifying person if they or a member of their household has demonstrated that they have undertaken unacceptable behaviours as defined in this section. This will not apply where the behaviour has been undertaken by a perpetrator of domestic abuse, who is no longer a member of the household.
- 4.7. Unacceptable behaviour includes breaches of tenancy conditions, including but not limited to:
- a. Having outstanding rent or service charge arrears, or property related recharges connected to a tenancy
  - b. Causing nuisance, annoyance or harassment (or allowing person visiting them to do so) within the locality of the property or doing so towards our staff or our contractors.
  - c. Having an unspent conviction for allowing their home to be used for immoral or illegal purposes
  - d. Having an unspent conviction for an offence which took place in their home or nearby to their home or within its locality.
  - e. Having an unspent conviction for an offence which occurred during and at the scene of a riot in the UK.
  - f. Where they have undertaken actual violence/abuse or made threats of violence/abuse towards another person that caused the applicant to either lose their home or required the person who was subject to the abuse to leave it.
  - g. If they have damaged or neglected their home or furniture provided by either a social or private landlord.
  - h. Where they have deliberately made a false statement to be granted a tenancy by a Local Authority or Housing Association.
  - i. Where they have paid or received money as part of a mutual exchange
  - j. Having unspent convictions or breaching an injunction for serious anti-social behaviour. This includes but is not limited to:
    - i. Being the tenant of a property that has been subject to a closure order or otherwise contributing to the issue of a closure order.
    - ii. Noise nuisance and environmental legislation.
    - iii. Violent offences.
    - iv. Sexual offences.
    - v. Offences involving weapons.
    - vi. Offences against property.
    - vii. Drug related offences.
    - viii. Modern slavery.

- ix. Encouraging or assisting serious antisocial behaviour.
- x. Conduct causing nuisance to a landlord.

4.8. The following exceptions to 4.7. above apply in relation to rent arrears:

- a. Where the individual was not a tenant when the outstanding arrears or recharges were accrued (e.g. the arrears or recharges occurred after a person stopped being a tenant or were caused by a former member of their household).
- b. The outstanding arrears or recharges accrued have been written off (e.g. they have been repaid or are legally ruled out due to being accrued more than 7 years ago and never being acknowledged by the debtor).
- c. Where the individual or household member has:
  - i. Agreed a repayment schedule for the outstanding arrears or recharges; and
  - ii. Made at least three consecutive repayments as per the repayment schedule; and
  - iii. Are up to-date with their repayments schedule;
- d. If the applicant is a social housing tenant under-occupying their current home as defined by this scheme and intends to downsize to a smaller home
- e. Their arrears or recharges were as a result of them being a victim of domestic abuse (e.g. financial abuse)
- f. They are a serving, or former member, of the regular Armed Forces, or their spouse or civil partner is/was, who has accrued mesne profit charges as a result continuing to live in a home provided to them by the Armed Forces, following a relationship breakdown.

### Financial criteria

4.9. A person is not a qualifying person when their household earnings and/or savings allow them to meet their housing needs from the commercial housing market, due to:

- a. Being a sole or joint owner (including anyone who has a mortgage for the whole or part of a home) of a house (including flats and second or holiday homes), which they usually live in or rent to others for them to live in, or building or land intended for use for a residential dwelling, in the UK or abroad.
- b. Having £16,000 or more of savings (£23,500 for adults who have been assessed by Kent County Council as needing care).

- c. Earning £60,000 or more of taxable income in the most recent tax year.

4.10. Exceptions to homeownership and the earnings and savings, apply to people who:

- a. Are elderly, who cannot stay in their own home due to their needs and require a move into sheltered housing, and where their home is no longer suitable to occupy. This provision would be disappplied where an applicant has sufficient equity and/or savings to secure suitable accommodation in the private rented sector, or by purchasing a home elsewhere.
- b. Have a home that is in a poor condition of repair, and continued occupation of the home may endanger the health of a member of their household, where no other reasonable steps can be taken by the person or their landlord to prevent the danger.
- c. Have been deserted by the main wage earner following a relationship breakdown and may become homeless because their home is now unaffordable.
- d. It is probable that occupying the home will lead to domestic abuse as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- e. Are Armed Forces personnel or their families, in relation to any lump sum compensation received for injury or disability sustained on active service with Regular or Reserve Forces.
- f. A young person leaving care, or a former care leaver, who is in receipt of funds paid to them as a result of compensation relating to the reason why they were a looked after child and/or as a result of experiences while a looked after child.
- g. Foster carers and adopters, special guardians, and family and friend carers approved by Kent County Council who do not have sufficient space in their current home, and who are unable to raise funds or otherwise secure alternative accommodation elsewhere.
- h. Are a social housing tenant in Ashford under-occupying their current home as defined by this scheme and intend to downsize to a smaller home.

## 5. Local Connection criteria

- 5.1. People applying to join the housing register must have a local connection as defined below in order to have their application processed. We are committed to supporting our local residents, as well as other key categories of individuals as defined by Part 6 Housing Act 1996 (as amended).
- 5.2. Applicants are required to provide appropriate documentary evidence that they have a relevant local connection, which we will then verify. We may undertake enquiries regarding local connection with relevant agencies, including but not limited to employers and revenue & benefits teams.
- 5.3. Current tenants living in social rented homes in Ashford at the time of application are excluded from local connection requirements.
- 5.3. A valid local connection will occur when one of the following applies to either the main applicant or a member of their household.
  1. Residence- the applicant or a member of their household has been living in the borough of Ashford for at least 3 years at the date of application and verification. The accommodation in Ashford must be accommodation of choice (e.g. time spent in custody, hospitals or secure in-patient units etc. would not be accommodation of choice).
  2. Family- having close family (defined as adult children, parents or siblings) resident in the borough of Ashford by their own choice for a minimum of 5 years, where there is a need to move to give or receive support, without which hardship would occur.
  3. Employment- being currently employed in the borough of Ashford, in work that is intended to last for 12 months or more and for at least 16 hours or more a week. Work may be across multiple employers with a break of no more than 8 weeks.
  4. Armed Forces- being a member of the Armed Forces Community who are:
    - a. Currently serving in the Regular Armed Forces
    - b. Formerly serving in the Regular Armed Forces within 5 years from the date of application (but not at the date of verification)
    - c. Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the Regular Armed forces where they are no longer able to remain in their Ministry

- of Defence accommodation following the death of their partner, or where the death was wholly or partly attributed to their service.
- d. Existing or former members of the Reserve Armed Forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability which is wholly or partially attributable to their service.
  - e. Divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence.
  - f. Adult children of currently serving members of the Armed Forces who may no longer be able to remain in the family home.
5. Care leavers- any care leaver under the age of 25 who are one of the following as defined by the Children's Act 1989, at both the time of application and verification:
- a. Eligible child - a person aged 16 or 17 who is currently looked after by children's social services and has been looked after for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14.
  - b. Relevant child - a person aged 16 or 17 who is no longer looked after by children's social services. They were looked after for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, including for at least 1 day on or after their 16th birthday.
  - c. Former relevant child - aged between 18 and 24 and previously an eligible/relevant child.
6. Homeless- a person owed either the s195(2) prevention duty, s189b(2) relief duty or s193(2) duty under Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended) by Ashford Borough Council.
7. Domestic abuse- any person who is or has been a victim of domestic abuse, who needs to move for reasons connected to that abuse. This would include moves from temporary accommodation. In this context, a person fleeing domestic abuse is given the same meaning as the definition in section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
8. Returning resident- a person returning to the borough of Ashford where they previously were brought up or lived for at least 10 years, following a period of hospitalisation or other exceptional circumstance.
- 5.4. We reserve the right to consider exceptional circumstances which do not readily meet the local connection criteria above, but which otherwise may give rise to the waiving of this. This could include, for example, a need to move for significant

support, specialist school placement or medical treatment which is otherwise unavailable and would cause significant hardship without a move to the borough.

## 6. Housing need

- 6.1. In order to join the housing register, applicants must demonstrate that either they or a member of their household have a housing need in addition to a local connection. When making decisions about housing need, we will disregard the circumstances of any household member who would not be eligible for an allocation of social housing.
- 6.2. A valid housing need will occur when one of the following applies:
1. Homeless- any person who is homeless as defined by Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended), including those owed duties under s195(2), s189b(2) and s193(2) of that Act by us.
  2. Overcrowding- people who are overcrowded by 1 or more bedroom as defined by the bedroom standards set out in this policy. Where it is assessed that there is a medical need for an additional bedroom, which is not met in their current home, the overcrowding need will apply, and the application will not fall under paragraph 5 unless a separate qualifying medical need exists.
  3. Under occupation- people who are under-occupying social rented housing within the borough of Ashford by 1 or more bedrooms as defined by the bedroom standards set out in this policy.
  4. Armed Forces- being a member of the Armed Forces Community, bereaved spouse or civil partner, who are no longer able to remain in their Ministry of Defence accommodation following the cessation of service, death of a partner or relationship breakdown.
  5. Medical- people who need to move because their current home is not medically suitable for them, or a member of their household, as a result of a physical disability, mobility needs, mental health issues or a learning disability. In cases where adaptations to their current can be made within a reasonable period of time, we will not consider that someone has a housing need.
  6. Unsuitable accommodation- those who need to move as a result of housing which is hazardous as a result of one or more category 1 hazard as defined by the HHSRS. Hazards which can be resolved within a period of 6 months will be disregarded for the purposes of housing need.



7. Hardship- this will include households who need to move to prevent hardship, and includes but is not limited to:
- a. Financial- someone who's home is unaffordable for them after all reasonable expenditures have been considered. We may use independent guidance to consider which expenses are considered as reasonable, and at what level.
  - b. Care- needing to move to give or receive care, which would otherwise be unavailable, and where not moving would cause hardship to themselves or others.
  - c. Employment & training- where a move needs to be undertaken to continue or take up employment or training within the borough, where failing to do so would cause hardship.
  - d. Domestic abuse- where a person needs to leave their current home as a result of domestic abuse, as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, including those in temporary accommodation or refuge.
  - e. Other forms of violence and abuse- those who need to leave their home as a result of a risk of violence or abuse which is not domestic abuse, and where failure to move would cause hardship.
  - f. Supported housing- people who need to move on from supported housing owned by us or one of our partners in Ashford.

## 7. Banding and allocations

7.1. We recognise that there is a limited supply of social rented homes available to households via the housing register, and so places households in bands based on the severity of their housing need. Housing need alone does not allow a person to join the housing register, and they will still be required to meet the qualifying criteria and have a local connection as set out in this scheme for any band to be awarded.

7.2. The bands are as follows:

- Band H- Homeless
- Band A- Urgent Housing Need
- Band B- Significant Housing Need
- Band C- Ongoing Housing Need

### Band H- Homeless

7.3. Those who are owed one of the following homelessness duties under Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended) by us will be placed into Band H:

1. S195(2)- usually known as the prevention duty, where someone is threatened with homelessness and we take reasonable steps to help them stay in their current home, or move into a new home which is suitable for them.
2. S189b(2)- known as the relief duty, where someone is actually homeless and we take reasonable steps to secure a new home which is suitable for them.
3. S193(2)- known as the full or main housing duty. We must make sure temporary accommodation remains available for people owed this duty, and secure suitable alternative housing for them.

7.4. Where a person is owed one of the above homelessness duties by us, they will only ever be placed into band H. This is the case even if they would usually otherwise qualify for entry to one of the other bands.

### Band A- Urgent Housing Need

7.5. Those with an Urgent Housing Need will fall into one of the following categories, unless they would be eligible for band H:

1. Overcrowded by 3 or more bedrooms.
2. Under occupying social rented housing in the borough of Ashford by 1 or more bedrooms.
3. People whose current home poses an imminent and significant risk of harm to a person's health and safety. By way of example, these are hazards requiring repair which could kill, injure or seriously damage the health and safety of any person in the household.

4. People who have a medical need to move, where their condition is terminal in nature or life threatening and impacted by their current housing or inability to access support without a move.
5. Any person who meets the housing need criteria set out in section 6, paragraph 4 for the Armed Forces.
6. Those who meet the housing need criteria set out in section 6, for hardship caused by domestic abuse or other violence and abuse, where they would meet the local connection criteria set out in section 5 as a resident, family member, returning resident or employment.
7. Foster carers and adopters, special guardians, and family and friend carers (who have taken on the care of a child because their parents are unable to provide care), who need a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child, approved by or being assessed by Kent County Council.
8. Those where a management move has been agreed under our Management Move Policy.
9. Former relevant children currently accommodated by Kent County Council, who need to leave their accommodation in the next year as a result of leaving care.

## Band B- Significant Housing Need

- 7.6. Those with a Significant Housing Need will fall into one of the following categories, unless they would be eligible for band H:
1. Overcrowded by 2 bedrooms
  2. People whose current home poses a risk of harm owing to any category 1 hazards as defined by the HHSRS, which are not likely to cause an imminent or significant risk of harm.
  3. People who need to move on medical grounds not covered under Band A, where there is a medical need to move as defined in section 6.
  4. Households whose current home is assessed as being unaffordable for them.
  5. Those who need to move to prevent hardship, where hardship would be significant in nature towards them or another person.
  6. People who are homeless as defined by Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended), but not owed the s195(2) prevention duty, s189b(2) relief duty or s193(2) homelessness duty by Ashford Borough Council.
  7. People who need to leave supported housing owned by us or one of our partners.

## Band C- Ongoing Housing Need

- 7.7. Those with an Ongoing Housing Need will fall into one of the following categories, unless they would be eligible for band H:
1. Overcrowded by 1 bedroom.
  2. Those who need to move to prevent hardship, where hardship would not be significant in nature towards them or another person.
  3. Those fleeing domestic abuse, but who do not meet local connection criteria in section 5 as a as a resident, family member, returning resident or employment.
  4. Any other housing need not specified in another band description.
- 7.8. We may, in exceptional circumstances, choose to disapply the banding criteria in specific circumstances, for example people who are supported by Police as witnesses or protected persons who need to move quickly from another local authority area. Agreement for this must be obtained from the Service Lead for Housing Options and Allocations or another post of sufficient seniority.

## 8. Households and bedroom allocations

- 8.1. Household composition will determine the number of bedrooms in a home that an applicant can be awarded on the housing register. A separate bedroom will be allocated to each of the following:
- a. Any adult couple
  - b. Any single person aged 16 years or over, unless c or d apply
  - c. Two children of the same sex, where there is no more than 8 years between their ages
  - d. Two children of the opposite sex, aged under 10
- 8.2. In cases where there is only 1 child in a household, or where there is an odd number of children, a child who cannot be paired with another as per the above will be allocated a separate bedroom.
- 8.3. An additional bedroom may also be considered for those who require permanent overnight carer or a separate bedroom to meet medical needs. Evidence to support this must be provided by the applicant. Permission for additional bedroom allocations must be sought from the Allocations Manager, or another staff member of sufficient seniority.
- 8.4. Household members are considered as those who are normally resident with the main applicant at the time of the initial application, and who are established members of the household.
- 8.5. We will also consider those reasonably expected to reside with the main applicant. This may include but is not limited to:
1. Children in the care of childrens' services or staying with relatives but who must return to the main applicant's household, where evidence has been provided by Kent County Council or another relevant authority of this.
  2. Foster children, potential adoptive children, or other children who are reasonably expected to reside with the main applicant
  3. Children living with one parent outside of the household, but who also need a bedroom with the main applicant as a result of exceptional circumstances, such as significant medical issues, disability or support needs.
  4. Children of a person whom has earlier fled their home as a result of domestic abuse as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
  5. A person who would normally be resident with the applicant, but who is unable to do so owing to being in hospital.

6. The partner of the main applicant, who is unable to currently live with them.
7. A current or prospective carer, where overnight care is required.

## 9. Operation of the housing register

- 9.1. We will put a person on the housing register if they have submitted a valid online application, provided requested evidence in order to adequately assess their application, are a qualifying person and who meet local connection and housing need criteria. We will consider every application received to join the housing register, provided it is made in accordance with the rules of this scheme.
- 9.2. Applications to join the housing register can only be made on a standard online form, which shall be accompanied by guidance notes that are easy to understand and in plain language. A person can only make one application at any given time to join the housing register.
- 9.3. After application of this scheme, we will inform the applicant in writing if their application to join the housing register has been successful. Should this not be the case, we will set out our reasons for this decision in writing.
- 9.4. We will amend a person's entry on the housing register, whenever there is an applicable change in their circumstances, or when there is an alteration to our Housing Allocation Scheme. We shall notify a person when their entry on the housing register is amended, explaining the reasons for any amendment. Any amendment that results in a person being afforded a higher priority, shall be given a new priority date. Any change that results in a person having the same degree of priority, lower priority or entry into Band H, will retain their original registration date.
- 9.5. We will review the housing register regularly to make sure information held about each person is up to date. In order to do so, we will operate an annual rolling review, contacting people on the housing register, on the anniversary of their application. The annual review will provide an opportunity for applicants to confirm if their circumstances have changed and to see if they wish to remain on the housing register.
- 9.6. We will remove a person from the housing register, if any of the following occur:
  - a. A person is no longer eligible, no longer qualifies or does not have a housing need or local connection as set out in this scheme.
  - b. A person requests to be removed from the housing register.
  - c. The main applicant dies and there is no other suitable person who should or wishes to continue the application within the household.

- d. A person fails to respond to a first request and a follow-up request, to a review of information held about them on the housing register or other correspondence, such as request for information or an allocation of housing
  - e. A person has have moved away or no longer needs or wants to be housed by us.
- 9.7. We will notify a person when they are declined entry to or removed from the housing register, explaining the reasons for the removal in full and any information considered when reaching this decision. We will also confirm in writing when a person is accepted onto the housing register, their banding, bedroom allocation and priority date.
- 9.8. We will reinstate a person to the housing register, if they get back in contact within six months of being removed and if they remain eligible and qualifying for an allocation of social housing, with a housing need and local connection. In these circumstances, the individual will not need to complete a new application form. When we reinstate a person to the housing register, we will keep the priority date from their original application.
- 9.9. A person applying to join the housing register is required to provide sufficient detail about their personal circumstances, to enable us to assess their eligibility, local connection and housing need, or to identify those cases where further evidence may be requested. We may liaise with other local authorities, other landlords and other agencies (e.g. adult social services, children services, NHS trusts, prisons and probation, Home Office) to verify a person's circumstances, eligibility, local connection and their housing needs. When carrying out liaison, we will do so in accordance with information sharing protocols or with direct consent from the applicant.



## 10. Reviews of decisions

10.1. We will inform a person of their right to request a review of the following decisions:

- a. Not to put a person on the housing register due to them being ineligible or not a qualifying person.
- b. To remove a person from the housing register.
- c. Any other facts of their case which have been taken into account when considering an allocation of social rented housing, including:
  - i. The band awarded and whether or not this is a fair reflection of their housing needs, medical conditions, other welfare needs, or any other facts regarding their entitlement to a reasonable preference for an allocation of social rented housing.
  - ii. Whether or not an applicant should receive additional preference due to having urgent housing needs or otherwise.
  - iii. They have been unfairly suspended or their application has been unreasonably cancelled.
  - iv. The suitability of housing which has been refused.
  - v. Offences related to information given or withheld by them.
  - vi. Fraudulent or incorrect allocations.
  - vii. The size or type of property for which they will be considered for housing.

10.2. A person must make a request for a review before the end of the period of 21 days, beginning with the date on which they are notified of our decision and reasons. We may, in exceptional circumstances, allow a person a longer period to make a request for a review. A person may make a request to review in writing (e.g. via a letter, or email) or orally (e.g. for a telephone call or visiting our offices.) Applicants are entitled to instruct another individual or organisation to submit a request for a review on their behalf.

10.3. When making a request for a review, a person should set out the reasons for their request.

10.4. A person cannot request a review of a decision reached on an earlier review. Upon receipt of a review request, we shall carry out a review of their decision in accordance with the procedure set out in the relevant section of this policy (section10).

- 10.5. We will notify a person when a review of a decision commences, as well as the decision reached at the conclusion of the review.
- 10.6. Applicants may also make a complaint in line with our Complaints Handling Policy, or if they are our existing tenants, the Housing Service Complaints Policy, which can be found on our website. A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions or lack of actions. In line with these policies, service requests may also be made by applicants. These are not complaints and can normally be addressed through our standard operational procedures.
- 10.7. Reviews will be carried out by an officer who was not involved in the original decision, who is of the same or higher seniority to the officer who made that decision.
- 10.8. Applicants may make written representations which should be received by us within at least five days of a person submitting their review request.
- 10.9. At our discretion, we will undertake a meeting in person with applicants and allow a person to be represented by a third-party of their choosing at any such discussions. We will determine whether or not an in-person meeting takes place based on the facts and circumstances of the particular case, in addition to our public sector equality duty. We are more likely to hold an in-person meeting when an applicant has not made any written representations. If there is to be a meeting, we shall give notice to a person of the date, time and place no sooner than five days after a request for this, unless a person consents to less notice. We will proceed with a meeting even in the absence of the applicant, taking account of any explanation offered for their absence. We may allow for the postponement of a meeting and will determine whether or not to grant or refuse request to postpone this at our discretion. We shall reasonably adjourn a meeting at any time, as we see fit. If a review is rescheduled, and the person carrying out the review on our behalf has changed, the meeting should be a complete rehearing of the case.
- 10.10. When carrying out a review, we shall consider all of the facts previously made available to it when the original decision was made, along with any new or additional information available at the date the review decision is made. A review decision will concentrate on reaching a conclusion as to whether the original decision was made consistently with this Housing Allocation Scheme and whether the original decision was compatible with the law. A review decision will

set out whether the original position is being upheld, overturned or varied and give reasons for any conclusion reached.

10.11. We shall notify the person concerned of the decision on the review, via their individual user account.

10.12. We will complete a review of a decision and notify an applicant of the decision via their online portal, within 56 days of receiving the review request. In some circumstances we may make an agreement with the person who requested the review to extend the period of time in which the review shall be completed.

10.13. We will also provide people with information about rights to seek a judicial review, make a complaint in line with our Complaints Handling Policies or make a complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman Service where applicable.

10.14. Where a person is unhappy with the outcome of their review, a subsequent review would only normally be undertaken where the applicant can demonstrate a misapplication of this scheme, or where new information has become available which was not available during the initial review, and which is likely to have had a material impact on the outcome of the review.

## 11. Applications and information

- 11.1. We are committed to complying with our public sector equality duty and will ensure that no applicants are discriminated against or treated unfairly. We will provide advice and information, free of charge, to people in the borough of Ashford, about the apply to join the housing register, regardless as of whether or not a person might wish to make an application. This includes but is not limited to:
- a. Application procedures.
  - b. Qualification and prioritisation criteria.
  - c. How to apply for advertised vacancies.
  - d. How people on the housing register are selected for an allocation of social rented housing.
  - e. Advertising criteria (e.g. priority for bungalows is given to older people or accessible housing for those with disabilities).
  - f. Review procedures.
- 11.2. Where an individual is unable to make a housing register application due to a protected characteristic, digital exclusion or other significant reason, we will provide relevant advice and assistance to help them make an initial application to join the housing register free of charge.
- 11.3. We will produce and provide guidance notes that are easy to understand and in a plain language, to help a person complete their application to join the housing register. Wherever possible, such documents will be co-produced with service users to ensure that they are accessible for a range of needs.
- 11.4. We will only request information needed to assess whether a person is eligible, qualifies to join the housing register and to assess their priority for housing. In cases involving harassment or domestic abuse, we will take a trauma informed approach to requesting relevant evidence and supporting letters. We acknowledge in some cases, this may not be available, and where this is the case, we will rely on our own assessment of the circumstances using mechanisms like the Dash risk assessment. Appropriate evidence could include but is not limited to:
- a. A contract of employment.
  - b. Wage/salary slips covering a certain period of time.
  - c. Bank statements.

- d. Tax and benefits information, for example proof that a person is in receipt of welfare benefits.
  - e. Supporting letters from professionals.
  - f. ID, such as birth certificates, passports etc.
- 11.5. We will work together with other relevant agencies and providers, to ensure people can apply to join the housing register and consider support requirements at different stages of the allocation process. This extends to people who do not have access to or are unable to use a computer or the internet. We, together with social services, prisons, probation and relevant health bodies and professionals, other housing providers, the voluntary sector, carers and user groups, will identify people who are likely to require intensive support throughout the process, such as assistance to choose housing that is appropriate to meet their needs, and make sure that suitable assistance is available. We may provide assistance ourselves or rely on other organisations and individuals to provide this as appropriate.
- 11.6. We can provide access to translation and interpreting services for people whose first language is not English. Where we identify a large community of speakers of a particular language, we might publish information in that language.
- 11.7. We will also provide information in other accessible formats for people with various communication needs, for example people with learning disabilities, people with literacy issues and people with a visual or hearing impairment. This might include large print, British Sign Language (BSL), braille or audio.
- 11.8. We will also provide information to people who are likely to have difficulty accessing information, for example, via outreach work, home visits, housing advice surgeries to prisoners, the gypsy and traveller community, etc.
- 11.9. We will provide user-friendly information about our Housing Allocation Scheme on an ongoing basis via our website, by phone and in printed hardcopy form upon request.
- 11.10. We will also make available general information about the profile of social rented housing in the borough of Ashford. This might include the type, size and location of the housing, whether it is accessible or could be adapted, whether there is access to a shared or private garden, how old it is, and how frequently it is likely to become available.

11.11. We will also provide information about other appropriate housing options which might be available to people in the borough of Ashford. This information will be made available more generally via our website. This might include information about:

- a. Private rented housing.
- b. Low-cost homeownership options.
- c. Mobility schemes, which enable people to move out of the borough of Ashford.
- d. Home improvement schemes or aid and adaptation services which enable people to remain in their existing home for longer.
- e. Safety schemes to allow people to remain at home with additional security measures.

11.12. When they first join the housing register, we will inform applicants that a choice-based system is being used to help allocate homes, so they know how the system works and to assist them to participate successfully in bidding for homes being advertised as available to let.

11.13. We will provide generalised information, via the Kent Homechoice website, about homes which have been allocated through our Housing Allocation Scheme, to help people on the housing register make decisions about what sort of homes to bid for. This information might specify the number of bids received for a property, give an indication of the reason why the property was allocated to the successful person and the level of priority they had under the scheme (e.g. band and waiting time).

11.14. Upon request from a person on the housing register, we will provide personalised feedback about a particular vacancy they might have been interested in but were unsuccessful in bidding for. This might include their relative position on the shortlist, or why they were unsuccessful, where this information is otherwise unavailable or cannot be accessed by the applicant via the Kent Homechoice website.

11.15. We will also provide people on the housing register with information about particular vacancies which are advertised. Vacancies shall be advertised via the Kent Homechoice website. For people who cannot use a website, at their request we can bid on a vacancy or set up an auto-bidding system on their behalf.

11.16 The Kent Homechoice website will be accessible for people who have visual impairment or learning disabilities. As much as possible, information will be provided using symbols and maps. This information can also be provided in large print, braille, made available on disk or tape, and be translated upon request. This information is intended to help people to determine:

- a. Whether they are entitled to bid for a property.
- b. Whether a property meet their needs and any other requirements.
- c. What their likelihood of success would be if they made a bid for a property.
- d. Basic details about a property such as:
  - i. Location,
  - ii. Type (e.g. flat, bungalow, etc),
  - iii. Size (e.g. number of bedrooms),
  - iv. Floor, and whether or not it has a lift,
  - v. Type of heating,
  - vi. Whether it has a garden,
  - vii. The amount of rent payable,
  - viii. Type and level of adaptations,
  - ix. Condition of the property,
  - x. Access to services,
  - xi. Information about transport, education and other local public services, and
  - xii. What type of applicant is entitled or excluded from bidding for a property, or who will be given a preference for a property.

11.17. We aim to process initial applications within 33 working days. Further verification of eligibility to be on the register, local connection, housing need and banding will be undertaken at the point of offer, should one be made. Where these criteria no longer apply, the application will be reviewed in accordance with this scheme.

11.18. People applying to join the housing register will be asked to sign a declaration that the information they have provided is correct to their knowledge. They will be advised that we are entitled to raise action in the court for the recovery of possession where a tenancy has been given on the base of false information supplied by the person.

11.19. We recognise that applications will contain personal data, and in many cases, sensitive data. We will observe the rules governing the processing and sharing of personal data in line with relevant legislation, including but not limited to the UK

General Data Protection Regulation 2018, Data Protection Act 2018, Freedom of Information Act and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

- 11.20. We have pledged to work with the Armed Forces to help and support regular and reservist servicemen and women, veterans and service families. Our Armed Forces Covenant exists to encourage support for the Armed Forces Community in Ashford, and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by this community.
- 11.21. The key principals of the Covenant centre around ensuring that no member of the Armed Forces Community faces disadvantage compared to local residents when accessing services in Ashford. Special consideration will be appropriate in cases where household members have given the most, such as those who have sustained life changing injuries or who are bereaved.
- 11.22. Sections 5, 6 & 7 of this document (local connection, housing need and banding respectively) set this commitment out clearly, to ensure our full and proud commitment to the Covenant. We also reserve the right to exercise discretion in relation to banding and direct offers of housing in cases of special consideration where exceptional circumstances have occurred.



## 12. Allocations

### Choice Based Lettings

- 12.1. We will prioritise people on the housing register, and allocate homes, following the procedures set out in this section.
- 12.2. We will offer people on the housing register a choice of the home that might be allocated to them. People will be able to apply (referred to as ‘bidding’) for particular homes which are advertised as vacant on the Kent Homechoice website. This will allow people to express their preference for the home they wish to be allocated. We shall, whenever possible, take such preferences into account when allocating housing, unless doing so contradicts this scheme.
- 12.3. We operate an ‘open advertising’ approach whereby all people on the housing register, and members of the wider population, can find out about vacancies which are advertised on the Kent Homechoice website.
- 12.4. Specialist and supported housing will be advertised via the Kent Homechoice website, to extend choice to as many people as possible. However, where housing designated for a specific purpose (e.g. housing for older people, accessible housing adapted for disabled people, housing for people sleeping rough, etc) or supported housing is advertised alongside other homes, it will be made clear that only those people with relevant housing and/or support needs may bid for it. This shall be done, for example, by making clear in the details of the advert, that only certain categories of people will be considered for the homes.
- 12.5. We reserve the right to reject a bid on grounds of risk in undertaking an offer to the individual. People shall be informed of the reasons for such decisions and will be informed of the properties they can bid for. People who pose a risk to themselves, to other individuals, or are risk from other individuals, for example due to sexual or violent offences, may be restricted in the homes that they can bid for. The extent of risk posed shall be determined based on the facts of the case, and evidence available in relation to the application. We will seek reliable evidence to determine the extent of current or future potential risks. The level of risk will be determined by considering all relevant information available proportionally. Where evidence is inconclusive, we will give the individual the benefit of the doubt. We otherwise reserve the right to consider information before us on the balance of probabilities. Before a final decision has been reached about the extent of risk associated with a person, we will provide the applicant an opportunity to comment on our findings before issuing a final determination.

12.6. We reserve the right to make a direct let for management reasons (e.g. managing risk, management moves, decants) and in circumstances which allow us to make best use of the social rented housing available via the housing register, or otherwise to address undue pressures upon the wider housing service and in exceptional circumstances. This means that applicants will not be offered choice in housing.

12.7. A direct let may also be made when a person is not bidding for properties that they would otherwise be entitled to receive an offer for, unless they are owed a s195(2) prevention duty, s189b(2) relief duty or s193(2) main housing duty by us, in which case other considerations apply (see paragraph 12.17-12.19 in this section). Examples of when a direct let might be made may include by are not limited to:

- a. People whose home has been compulsory purchased (where we are required to offer a specific property to meet legal requirements).
- b. People who are tenants, who need to leave their original home to facilitate an area regeneration scheme, who do not bid for any advertised homes that would be suitable for them to occupy.
- c. People who are homeless.
- d. People seeking a move under a witness mobility scheme.
- e. People subject to multiagency public protection arrangements (for assessing and managing the risks opposed by sexual and violent offenders), who pose a very serious risk to the community (e.g. MAPPA level 1 and 2 cases).

12.8. As a general rule, homes which have been advertised shall be offered to an applicant who:

- a. Is in the relevant banding for the property advertised.
- b. Has been on the housing register the longest (by date of application to join the housing register).
- c. Matches the lettings criteria for that home (e.g. the type of home, its size and bedroom needs of the household, its location, local lettings criteria etc).
- d. Matches any quotas in place.

12.9. A more restrictive letting criteria will be made when making first lets of homes on new housing developments, or due to a local letting policy being in operation. Additionally, we will also reject a bid for existing homes, which would otherwise have been successful, where the home would not be suitable for that particular

person (e.g. due to needing to manage risks posed by them, another member of the community or where the property would not meet their identified needs).

12.10. We will not reject bids unless there are sound reasons for doing so. There will sometimes be good reasons why the person at the top of the list is not offered a home and is bypassed on that occasion. Where we do pass over a bid, which would have otherwise been successful, we can provide applicants with the reasons for this decision on request. Applicants may also make a complaint or undertake a service request in line with our Complaints Handling Policy or Housing Service Complaints Policy, as applicable. As such, we will keep a record of reasons behind decisions to bypass a person on the housing register. This information will help in monitoring the operation of the Housing Allocation Scheme and make sure that we are not systematically disadvantaging particular individuals or groups. Common reasons for bypassing a person on the housing register might include:

- a. The home is ground floor, accessible or adaptable and the person does not need those features but there is another person who does.
- b. The person has already refused a very similar property or has said they're not interested in receiving a similar offer.
- c. The home has been designed or adapted for people with particular needs and should be allocated to someone who needs a property of that type.
- d. The home is within an older person's scheme, and the applicant or a member of their household does not meet the relevant age criteria to access this.
- e. Parish local connection criteria.

## Offers and refusals

12.11. The fact that an applicant has made a bid for a home should not be treated as meaning that we have made our final decision to allocate the property to them. We may on occasion withdraw an allocation of home, for example, if a person:

- a. Is no longer eligible to be allocated social rented housing.
- b. No longer qualifies to join the scheme.
- c. Would be overcrowded or under-occupy a home if it was allocated to them.
- d. Does not require such adaptations, but the property they have bid for has adaptations which would make the home accessible for a disabled person.

- e. Is disabled and requires adaptations to be made to a home that has been allocated, to make accessible for them, but it is not possible for appropriate adaptations to be made to the home.
- f. The home is designated as supported housing (e.g. sheltered housing, extra care housing) and the person does not need this type of housing.
- g. The person would be at risk of domestic abuse, violence, or threats of violence likely to be carried out due to the locality of the home would be allocated to them.

12.12. We reserve the right, on very rare occasions, to use our discretion to make an allocation outside the rules of this scheme. For example, if Police recommended someone moves home because they are at significant risk of harm, no other options are available, and they require urgent help to rehouse a person immediately. We may also do so in circumstances where a reciprocal letting is agreed with another local authority. When using our discretion, we will ensure that the person has an exceptional level of need, greater than others on the housing register or that the circumstances are so extreme or unusual that they would not be adequately prioritised for a home. We will keep a clear audit trail when discretion has been used and record the reasons for an allocation in detail. There shall be clear authorisation processes in place, with authorisation by the Service Lead for Housing Options and Allocations, or another member of staff with sufficient seniority.

12.13. We are committed to ensuring communities are supported to remain sustainable, and free from anti-social behaviour or other issues which impact the locality of the housing. We will only make suitable and sustainable allocations of housing, where there is a good probability of providing a long-term, stable solution for a person on the housing register and surrounding neighbours. We will make every effort to ensure that allocations do not lead to housing management problems and instead result in a sustainable tenancy. Alongside this, we will use a system of sensitive allocations (sometimes known as sensitive lettings). Instead of automatically allocating a property to a person at the top of the bidding list, careful consideration will be given to the suitability of the person for a vacancy, based on the information held about that person and knowledge of the property, it's location, neighbours and so on. To do so, we will balance a range of factors including an applicant's housing need, their suitability for a home, and needs of prospective neighbours. For example, allocating a hard to let home which may exacerbate problems which previously led to homelessness, or placing a person with significant vulnerabilities in a block which is known to be subject to anti-social behaviour, or crimes of exploitation (e.g. cuckooing, County Lines, etc.). We will only use a sensitive

allocation approach where there are good reasons for doing so and shall ensure that we keep a record of why decisions were made, ensuring these are accountable and transparent.

- 12.14. We will allow people a reasonable period of time to make a decision about any home offered to them, providing them with an opportunity to view the home before making a decision wherever possible. We will allow sufficient time for people who require additional assistance and/or support to arrange for an adviser or an advocate (who may be a friend or family member) to accompany them when viewing a home, as well as taking advice in making their decision to accept or reject an offer.
- 12.15. People who are not owed a s195(2) prevention duty, s189b(2) relief duty or s193(2) main housing duty by us can be offered up to 3 properties, 2 of which can be refused. After a 3<sup>rd</sup> refusal an applicant will have their priority date reset to the date of the last refusal. This approach is designed to minimise the time lost in making offers that are not accepted, and ensure fairness when refusals are undertaken due to incorrect or limited information about particular homes. People on the housing register shall be reminded of the limit to the number of offers made when an offer is made to them. When a person refuses any offer, a first step will be to encourage the person to consider and discuss the choices they made in bidding on the property, where applicable.
- 12.16. Where an offer of a home is made to someone, but their circumstances are such that it's not practical for them to engage in the letting process, we will consider if it's appropriate to bypass the person for the offer without being penalised. This may occur, for example, where someone is unwell, or experiencing exceptional life stressors.

#### People who are owed certain homelessness duties

- 12.17. We may make a direct let to any person who is owed a s195(2) prevention duty, s189b(2) relief duty or s193(2) main housing duty by us under Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended). To accomplish this, we may automatically make a bid on behalf of any person who is owed one of the aforementioned duties, or otherwise directly allocate them a property. An applicant owed one of these duties will only be made one offer of suitable housing, within the meaning of Part 7 Housing Act 1996 (as amended), it's associated guidance and relevant case law.

- 12.18. There are a number of consequences to the refusal or acceptance of offers of suitable accommodation for those owed one of the above duties. We will ensure that we clearly lay out the right to accept or refuse offers of suitable housing, and the consequences of doing so in relation to the relevant duty, in any relevant s184 decision letter, and where appropriate, offer letter.
- 12.19. Where one of the above duties ends, and no other specified duty is owed, an applicant will only remain on the housing register if they continue to be eligible, have a local connection and a housing need. Their housing need and banding will be reassessed in line with this policy and their priority date reset to the date of the refusal.

### Disabled people

- 12.20. Housing which has been designed or adapted to meet the needs of disabled people will be advertised via the scheme. It will be prioritised for people who have needs for such adaptations, and this will be explained in the advertising criteria. Disabled people can apply for accessible vacancies, and for housing that does not meet their needs, where we have assessed and/or advised that it is reasonable and practical to adapt the home.
- 12.21. When an accessible property is advertised, the advertisement shall give sufficient information about the level of adaptations and/or accessibility features in the home wherever possible, so that people can make informed decision on whether or not to bid for a particular property. Information shall be included about external access to the property (e.g. whether there is a ramp up to the property and whether there is accessible parking nearby) and relevant information about the surrounding area (e.g. local shops and public transport that is easily accessible) where known.
- 12.22. We are committed to providing disabled people with additional assistance and support where required, depending on the nature and degree of their disability. We may advise individual disabled people when a suitable, accessible property is about to or has been advertised. We will make sure that the Housing Allocation Scheme website is accessible for people who have a visual impairment or learning disabilities. Adverts for properties available to let will use symbols where possible rather than, or as well as, words.

## Restricting choice

12.23. We will attach advertising criteria to particular homes, specifying that only people of a particular description may apply or be given preference for that particular property. This may occur where:

- a. Local lettings policies are being used to achieve housing management and other housing policy objectives
- b. People with accessible housing needs are matched to accessible homes.
- c. Older persons schemes with age restrictions are in place.

12.24. We do not allow every person to express an interest in, or be considered for every available home to let. Applicants are not permitted to bid for homes which would result in statutory overcrowding or under-occupation. However, on a case-by-case basis, under occupancy might be allowed for hard to let properties or where we wish to bring down the child density ratio in an area. Similarly, minor overcrowding may be allowed where households would be otherwise unable to be allocated housing due to the size of their household, and only where assessed as reasonable to do so. As such, couples and single people will not usually be permitted to bid for a home that has more than one bedroom. We will make the final decision on whether it is appropriate to allocate any particular home to any particular person. When doing so the following should be taken into account:

- a. Provision type (e.g. a home is supported housing or housing for older people and person has no need for such housing, or it is general needs housing and supported housing is required etc.)
- b. Rent type and charge (e.g. a person cannot afford the pay the rent and have enough money available to meet their reasonable living expenses).
- c. Unit size (e.g. a person and their household would be overcrowded or under-occupy a home).
- d. Letting criteria restrictions (e.g. a home must be allocated to disabled person with accessibility needs, or is subject to a s106 agreement etc.).
- e. Condition of the home (e.g. repairs and maintenance need to be carried out to a property and these cannot be completed while it is occupied, or within a reasonable period of time after an applicant might otherwise have moved into the home).
- f. Accessibility (e.g. it is not possible to make necessary adaptations, either at all or within a reasonable period of time after a person might have otherwise moved into a home).

- g. Location (e.g. a locality of the property would result in the applicant or members of their household being at risk to, or from, others).

## Quotas

12.25. We will set quotas to achieve a spread of allocations over the various bands.

Quotas shall be based on information we have gathered on housing need and demand in the borough of Ashford, as well as the needs of Ashford Borough Council and local community. This will be based on the profile of people on the housing register, as well as other relevant factors, such as the use of interim and temporary accommodation. Our considerations will also take into account the size and composition of the housing register, including the housing needs people have, the number of people in various bands, the various household sizes in each band and the proportion of those who are existing social housing tenants seeking a transfer, compared to people seeking a home. We will also consider the profile of stock and vacancies which are likely to become available, including different social housing types and rent rates.

12.26. We will avoid setting rigid quotas which cannot be amended quickly to reflect changing circumstances and instead will make sure there is sufficient flexibility to continue meeting local needs. A percentage quota of properties will be allocated to each band, to be determined based on the above factors and reviewed no less than 6 monthly.

## Local Lettings Plans

12.27. We will use local letting plans to allocate some homes to people of a particular description in order to achieve a wide variety of housing management and housing policy objectives, for example:

- a. To create balanced, multi-generational communities by managing the age range of households in a particular estate or area.
- b. To create more mixed communities, by setting aside a proportion of vacancies for people who are in employment or to enable people to take up employment.
- c. To attract essential workers or people in particular types of employment where skills are in short supply, into the borough of Ashford by giving them priority for a small number of properties.
- d. In order to deal sensitively with lettings on new development sites, giving priority to those with a local connection to the electoral ward area.



- e. To make sure that properties which are particularly suited to being made accessible (e.g. ground floor flats) are prioritised for those with access needs.
- f. Setting aside portion of properties to help the housing of people whose employment requires them to be mobile, such as members of the armed forces.

12.28. A local lettings plan shall be operated alongside this main scheme, and act as an additional set of circumstances which will be considered or rule which will be applied. A local lettings plan shall apply to a specific geographical area and be supported by evidence on why it is required. A local lettings plan shall have clear outcomes and have a time limit for when the plan needs to be reviewed, to determine whether it continues to be necessary for the plan to remain in force. Local lettings plans can be provided on request.

12.29. The proportion of homes or lettings which may be made available through a local letting plans will depend on the particular circumstances and factors at play, such as the size and composition of the housing register, the stock profile, and the number and type/size of vacancies which are available overall.

12.30. We will monitor and review local letting policies regularly, as to their effectiveness, to make sure decisions are fair and not discriminatory, and to establish where they are no longer appropriate or necessary.

### Low demand homes

12.31. We may use a variety of initiatives to stimulate demand for an improvement in letting outcomes for low demand homes or increase the number of allocations in an area. Low demand homes are characterised by high levels of empty houses, small or non-existent numbers of bids for vacancies, high refusal rates or low levels of tenancy sustainment.

12.32. We may, in exceptional circumstances, when there is no demand for a home from applicants on the housing register, consider:

- a. Making a direct let offer of the home to a person in temporary accommodation or pending a management move, where the offer of housing would be suitable for them.
- b. Marketing a home by advertising it beyond the usual Housing Allocation Scheme website.

- c. Promote the advantages of the area (e.g. transport, amenities) and the home (low rent, deposit, security of tenure).
- d. Set up a home and hold open days for prospective people on the housing register.
- e. Offer incentives, such as decoration allowances, rent free periods and/or white goods.
- f. Advertise the property to multiple bands, outside of the quota system.

12.33. When making allocations of a hard to let property, we will still do so to a person on the housing register, who has most priority and who will make the best use of the property.

### Modifying and altering this scheme

12.34. We will regularly review and update this scheme. Before modifying this scheme we will have regard to all relevant legislation, local strategies and policies.

12.35. Before making an alteration to the scheme which would be a major change of policy, we will send a copy of proposed alterations to every private registered provider, with whom we have a nomination arrangement and provide them with a reasonable opportunity to comment on proposals.

12.36. Before making a significant change to the scheme which would affect a large number of people on the housing register, we will inform applicants of the change. We shall consult on changes to the scheme, unless they are of such minor significance that they will be unlikely to unduly impact any applicant on the register (e.g. an amendment to wording to correct grammatical errors, or an update of our branding). Otherwise, we will engage with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. Kent County Council, NHS services, community justice services, voluntary organisations, etc), as well as people on the housing register, tenants, the general public and anyone who is affected by or interested in the way social housing will be allocated by us.

## 13. Information about this Housing Allocation Scheme

- 13.1. We will publish a summary of this Housing Allocation Scheme and provide a copy of the summary free of charge to any person who requests one. A copy of the summary is available to download from our website. Copies of the scheme summary can also be requested by contacting our Housing Options Team :

Phone number: 01233 331111  
Email: [housing.advice@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:housing.advice@ashford.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk)  
Address: Housing Options  
Ashford Borough Council  
International House  
Dover Place  
Ashford  
TN23 1HU

- 13.2. We will make a copy of this scheme available for inspection at our office, International House, Dover Place, Ashford. TN23 1HU. We shall, upon request from a person, provide a copy of the scheme, on receipt of payment of a reasonable fee to cover the cost of printing a copy.

## 14. Co-operation with private registered providers

- 14.1. We are committed to working together with private registered providers that own and manage stock in the borough of Ashford in order to make best use of the available social rented housing in the borough. We will make requests to private registered providers for them to offer an allocation of social housing to people on our housing register.
- 14.2. We will comply with requirements set out in any relevant nomination agreements in place with a private registered provider when making requests for social rented housing to be made available to persons from our housing register.
- 14.3. Nomination agreements will have clear aims and be based on a robust analysis of need and demand. Nomination agreements shall also set out the proportion of letting that will be made available by private register providers that own or manage stock in the borough of Ashford, to us, as well as setting out any criteria which has been adopted for accepting or rejecting nominations and how any disputes shall be resolved. We will monitor and regularly review nomination agreements to demonstrate that obligations are being met and to ensure they reflect changing needs and demand.
- 14.4. We shall, when making nominations to a private registered provider, make sure the details of a nominated person are accurate, comprehensive and up to date. We will also provide information about any vulnerability, support needs and arrangements for support, where this information is available.

## 15. False statements and withholding information

- 15.1. Section 171 of Part 6 Housing Act 1996 (as amended) provides that it is a criminal offence for someone to join, remain on or otherwise access the housing register or an offer of social rented housing by:
1. Knowingly or recklessly make a statement which is false in material particular or
  2. Knowingly withhold information which the authority has reasonably required them to give in connection with the exercise of our functions
- 15.2 In such cases, we will always consider this a reason for disqualifying a person from joining the housing register. The above applies at all stages of application, including at review.
- 15.2. We will look at the circumstances of each person rather than applying a blanket approach on whether to commence criminal proceedings against a person who has given false information or withheld information.
- 15.3. We will also take appropriate steps to vet staff who make decisions about the allocation of social rented housing. We will also require that a small proportion of decisions be checked against this policy by a senior member of staff via a system of random checks, to minimise the risk of staff allocating incorrectly or potentially fraudulently.

## 16. Elected members

- 16.1. Our elected members shall not be part of a decision-making body at the time an allocation decision is made, when either the housing concerned is situated in their electoral ward or the person subject to the decision has their sole or main residence there.
- 16.2. Elected members are permitted to represent their constituents in front of any decision-making body, such as seeking or providing information on behalf of their constituents, and be permitted to participate in the decision-making bodies deliberations prior to a decision.
- 16.3. Elected members should not attempt to confer an advantage on any person seeking an allocation of social rented housing. Elected members should always ensure compliance with our Code of Conduct and must consider whether they are required to declare an interest before participating in such deliberations. Elected members should seek to obtain advice from our Monitoring Officer, should there be any doubt.
- 16.4. Elected members may be involved in policy decisions that affect the generality of social rented housing in their electoral ward. They are also encouraged to welcome the views of their constituents during periods of consultation, as well as represent their constituents in suggesting policy improvements, where there is a need to do so.
- 16.5. Elected members remain responsible for determining allocation policies and monitoring the implementation of this Housing Allocation Scheme, to ensure the operation of the scheme is open and accountable, and that systems are compliant with our policy objectives.