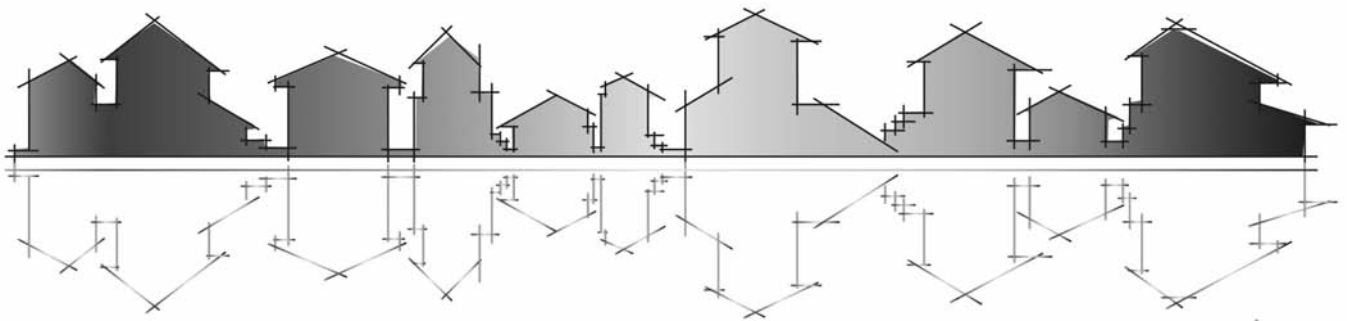


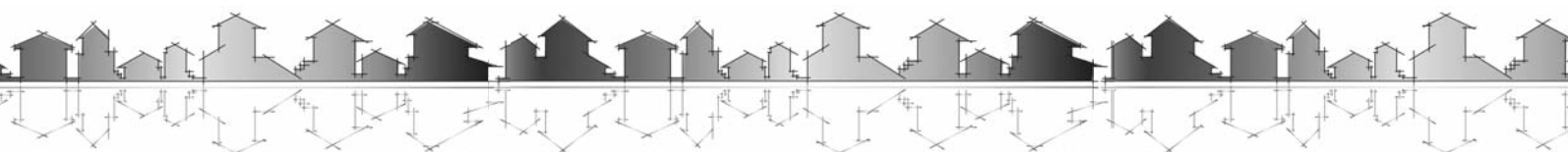
Tamworth Borough Council
Housing Services

'Finding a Home' Choice Based Lettings Policy Summary



Consultation August 2009

Tamworth
Borough Council



Introduction

This is a summary of the Council's draft Choice Based lettings housing allocation policy that outlines the changes in the way it will be allocating its available properties which we hope you find useful and informative. The new service is called Finding a Home.

Consultation events began in August and are open for three months. Please read through this booklet and complete the questionnaire at the end to tell us your thoughts and opinion. Please return this in the prepaid envelope provided by 30th November 2009.

A copy of the full Choice Based Lettings housing allocation policy is available on our website. If you would like a copy posting out to you please contact the Tenant Participation Team tel 01827 709374.

Background

The Council is moving from a points based housing allocation system to a choice based housing letting system early 2010. Although this new system does not mean we have any more homes available; for our customers it is a far simpler and fairer way of letting empty homes.

What are the benefits?

- Allowing you to make decisions about where you want to live and when you want to move;
- Helping to create settled communities and making the best use of our housing stock; and
- Having an interactive website to express interest on advertised vacant properties.

The choice based letting policy uses a banding system that is based on housing need. We will use this policy to assess the housing need of applicants and which band reflects their needs.

Applicants in the highest band will have a greater need for finding a home more quickly. Priority will be given to those who have been waiting the longest in their band.

If you are already on the housing register as a housing applicant or a transfer applicant, your application will be automatically transferred to the new scheme in the autumn of 2009 ready for when the new system to be launched early 2010. From November onwards we will be writing to you to tell you what band you are going to be placed in and you will have the opportunity to ask for this banding to be reviewed ahead of the new system being introduced.

If you are not already registered on the list you can apply at any time by completing an application form. Once we have received all of your information we have asked for we will write to you with your registration date, your registration number and the band you have been placed in.

What are the Bands?

People will be placed into one of five bands to reflect their priority for housing.

Applicants in Band 1+ will be ranked first followed by Bands 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Tamworth Borough Council will not apply additional or reduced preference for those applicants without local connection but will be assessed in accordance with their housing need.

Applicants with a history of rent arrears may find their banding priority order reduced. Applicants with a history of anti social behaviour may find themselves suspended from joining the housing register for up to five years.

Band	Categories
Band 1 +	Applicants assessed as statutory homeless from Tamworth Borough Council who are owed a full housing duty in Tamworth and who also display exceptional cumulative housing needs where the needs in question were not specifically related to their homelessness application. Applicants will be placed in this band for 2 months after which there will be a review of this priority award.
Band 1	<p>Applicants assessed as statutory homeless by Tamworth Borough Council and are owed a full housing duty in Tamworth</p> <p>Applicant's current home is within Tamworth and is due to be demolished, or is subject to a Demolition Order or to a Prohibition Order covering a main part of the dwelling, or has been included within a Clearance Area or has a lack of facilities. This would include situations where the condition of the property occupied is seriously detrimental to the health of any of the household and the defects to the property cannot be readily remedied.</p> <p>Where applicants are unable to continue to occupy their current accommodation due to high medical need or disability</p> <p>Applicants with a high need for alternative accommodation on the grounds of significant social welfare need including issues of vulnerability</p> <p>Applicants with a need to move to a particular locality where significant hardship would be caused if they did not move</p> <p>Applicants who are overcrowded because their present home is short of at least 3 bedrooms</p> <p>Applicants who can not continue to live in their current home because of serious harassment or violence</p> <p>Applicants that are presently the tenant of Tamworth Borough Council, and are prepared to move to a flat or bungalow, thereby making their current home available to a household that needs a house.</p> <p>Applicants that are presently living in short term supported housing and are required to move on. Confirmation from the organisation providing the supported accommodation that the applicant(s) is ready to move on and have completed a programme will be required.</p>
Band 2	<p>Applicants who are assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness but to whom a full housing duty is not owed and who may be from other Local Authorities where there is no statutory duty to obtain housing</p> <p>Applicants with a medium need for alternative accommodation on the grounds of serious social/welfare need including issues of vulnerability</p> <p>Applicants with a medium medical need who have been assessed as requiring suitable alternative accommodation because their medical condition and/ or disability is having a significant detrimental affect on their ability to live independently at home.</p> <p>Applicants who are overcrowded because their present home is short of at least 2 bedrooms.</p> <p>Applicants who are sharing facilities with more than 1 household, this would include sharing the bathroom or kitchen.</p> <p>Applicants who are in Armed Forces accommodation and have received a discharge notice</p> <p>Applicants who are non- successor households and joint tenancy termination households</p>
Band 3	<p>Applicants with a low medical need or disability where a move to more suitable alternative accommodation would improve their health</p> <p>Applicants who have a low housing need on welfare grounds will be placed in Band 3</p> <p>Applicants who are overcrowded because their bedroom is short of 1 bedroom</p> <p>Applicants who are currently adequately housed but who want to live independently of family or friends</p>
Band 4	Applicants who have no identified housing need or who have the financial resources and ability to find their own housing solutions

If there are 2 or more applicants with a similar level of need qualifying for a property, the date they entered the band will be used as a tiebreaker. If the band date are the same and the level of need is similar then the deciding factor will be to offer the property to the applicant whose household best fits the property attributes to ensure the best use of stock.

Accommodation will normally be offered according to an applicant’s needs as follows;

Property Household Criteria	
Property type	Allocation Guide
Bedsit / studio flat	Single person
One bed flat	Single person / childless couple
One bed Bungalow	Single person / couple one over age of 60 (younger people with a disability can also be considered)
High rise - two bed flats	Childless couples aged over 50+
Two bed bungalow	Couple with medical conditions requiring 2 bedrooms/couple with or without medical conditions over the age of 60/single person with live in carer/single person who is disabled subject to officer decision.
Two bed flat	Couples of households with one child or children who do not live with them but regularly visit * (proof of access required)
Two bed maisonette	Couples or households with one child or children who do not live with them but regularly visit* (proof of access)
Two bed house	Couples or households with one child or two children
Three bed flat	Households with 2 or more children
Three bed maisonette	Households with 2 or more children
Three bed house	Households with 2 or more children
Four bed house	Households with three or more children
Five bed house	Households with four or more children
Seven bed house	Households with five or more children
Sheltered Housing	Single or couples aged 60+ with an assessed need for supported housing (in exceptional circumstances people below this age can be considered).

Tamworth Borough Council will take into account households where there are siblings from the age of 5 and not as the same sex. The Council reserves the right to under occupy homes if this is the best use of housing stock lead by housing demand, adaptation or through individual personal need.

- Please note the property household criteria for maisonettes is currently under review and we may have in the future a local Lettings plan for these properties.

Council Housing by type and location

Area	House					Flat			Bungalow		Maisonette		
	No. of bedrooms					No. of bedrooms			No. of bedrooms		No. of bedrooms		
	2	3	4	5	7	1	2	3	1	2	1	2	3
Amington	11	190	14				32		21	2	56		
Belgrave	23	182	32	7	1				8		53		
Bolehal	102	118	24	2			22			1	55		
Borough Road		30											
Coton Green	10	34							19				
Dosthill	3	20							9	4			
Fazeley		67				8	24				22		
Gillway	60	106					70		10	60			
Glascote	52	305	29				7		38	52	28		30
Kettlebrook	13	133	2						7				
Leyfields	10	116	10			6	125		38	8	74		12
Old Amington			18			1	16			10	24		5
Old Glascote	8	59	1				11		5	9	9		
Stonydelph	104	331	18				101		33		102		
Town centre		11				180	166	1			7		2
The leys	2	56				7	3			4	1		
Wilnecote	99	113	6			15	5		6		24		77

What are the key differences between banding system and the current points system?

Existing Policy	New Choice Based Allocations Framework
Points based	There will be 5 Bands, which reflect cumulative need in each band and where housing needs are the same then in date order within that band.
Negative Points for rent arrears	There will be a reduced banding priority order for customers with a history of rent arrears.
Rewards Local Connection	There will be no blanket exclusion for those without local connection instead there will be a positive outcome to improve lettings to all sections of the community
No Local Lettings Arrangements	Provision for Local Lettings plans
Complicated Medical / social & Welfare & hardship assessment	There will be a simplified approach to assessing medical and social needs with time limited priority cards to ensure effective management
Exclusions for Anti social behaviour	There will be time limited suspension arrangements for anti social behaviour on a case by case basis
One FINAL offer for homeless priority cases	For statutory homeless applicants there will be a 2-month period of time in which to express interest in properties before the propriety banding order is reviewed.
2 offers resulting in refusals lead to application going into abeyance	There will be unlimited bidding opportunities. Note Priority may be reduced (if following review) for unreasonable refusals.
Incentive to Move - £1000 first bedroom & then £500 per bedroom thereafter	There will be an Incentive given for people moving from family type properties that are in demand to smaller accommodation i.e. a flat or bungalow
No priority for ex service personnel	Band 2 for service personnel
Inconsistency around overcrowding	Priority banding order will reflect; mixed sex overcrowding, statutory overcrowding, and number of bedroom requirements

This choice based lettings system reflects good practise, meets legal requirements and offers customers choice in where they live and greater involvement in the allocation process.

What is Cumulative need?

Some applicants may have cumulative need or multiple housing needs and so their needs will be prioritised. The new scheme will identify those people who have more than 1 urgent or high priority housing need to ensure they are given priority for an offer of accommodation.

Examples would be where applications are assessed as having a need within the allocations scheme under two or more categories in Band 2 they will move to Band 1 or two or more categories in Band 3 will move to Band 2.

Medical Needs

Priority banding will be given to those people with medical needs as assessed by a health and or social care professional. Priority will be assessed as High/medium/or low needs.

High	Where current housing conditions are having a major adverse affect on the medical condition of either the applicant or member of their household
Medium	Where applicants who have been assessed as requiring suitable alternative accommodation because their medical condition and/ or disability is having a detrimental affect on their ability to live independently at home
Low	Where applicants have been assessed as having a low medical need or disability where a move to suitable accommodation would improve their health

Support for vulnerable people

In line with our Equality Impact assessment and action plan we will provide additional support for people who have difficulty in accessing the new system. This could be due to their age, infirmity, disability, literacy problems, sight or hearing impairment, language barriers, etc. In these circumstances expressions of interest may automatically be placed on their behalf of by people acting as their advocates. We will also work with relevant statutory and voluntary organisations to ensure that vulnerable applicants are given assistance in accessing the scheme and in supporting them in their tenancies once they are successful in expressing an interest in a property.

Direct offers

Whilst the majority of our properties will be advertised on the new scheme some properties will not be advertised and will be allocated directly (these are known as direct offers), examples would be in the event of any emergency situation i.e. Victims of fire/flood or where a particularly sensitive allocation is required.

How the new system will work day to day

Step 1 Every week we will advertise all the available empty properties on our website, in the local press and posters displayed in Marmion House reception. The property advert will tell you the closing date and how to express your interest as well as all about the property, for example how many bedrooms, what the rent is and if there are any restrictions such as pets or age limits as well as information about the local amenities.

Step 2. You can then express an interest for all properties that you are interested in through our website, by telephone and in person. (There are no restrictions in the amount of properties you wish to express an interest in). All of the registered interests for the property will be recorded in priority order by band and the time on the register. Once the advertising period has ended, if you are at the top of the short list for the property we will contact you.

Step 3. An appointment will be made for you to view the property and we will agree a date with you to sign the tenancy agreement. Note other applicants may also be at the viewing incase you decline the property. A date will be agreed for you to collect the keys to your new home.

Step 4. We will not write to you if you are unsuccessful but Tamworth Borough Council will publish feedback about the number of successful customers for properties including the banding of the successful customer.

Managing performance

Housing Services will have a robust approach to monitoring its allocation policy. This will include setting service standards around customer satisfaction levels and waiting times. You will be able to track how we are performing by visiting the Council's web site, www.tamworth.gov.uk and clicking on the performance information link from the Housing main page.

Questions and answers

Q 1. **What if I am not used to using a computer?**

A You can ask your family, friends, children and support workers, etc to help you complete the on line application form. If you do not have a computer you can visit a library or use the portals available at Marmion House reception.

Q 2. **What if you need help?**

A Housing staff will be available to help you complete an application form and to express an interest in properties when the new service goes live. Housing advice surgeries are held every day except Wednesdays for applicants who need detailed housing advice. To ensure waiting time is kept to a minimum please book an appointment with the Housing Advice team.

Tel 01827 709459 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm) or Email; Housingadvice@tamworth.gov.uk

Q 3. **What if I do not accept the property I have expressed an interest in?**

A Applicants can decline offers without penalty except:

- Applicants owed a statutory duty as specified under Band 1 +
- Applicants who are homeless as specified under Band 1 and Band 2
- That for applicants in Band 1+, declining offers may lead Tamworth Borough Council to conclude that Band 1 status is no longer justified.

Applicants need to express their interest in properties they are interested in or to ask Tamworth Borough Council or someone else to do this on their behalf.

Q 4. **What if I disagree with my priority banding?**

A A request for a review of your priority banding should be made within 28 days of the decision being made. You should provide supporting evidence if necessary and explain why you require a review of the original decision. An independent senior officer from Tamworth Borough Council will carry out reviews.

Q 5. **Will accessible properties be advertised for people with disabilities?**

A Yes, any vacant property with adaptations will be advertised on the scheme and people with disabilities will be given preferences for this type of accommodation.

Q 6. **Will mutual exchanges be included in this new scheme?**

A No, there will be no changes for people wanting to mutual exchange properties and will continue to use 'Homeswapper'.

Q 7. **Will transfers be included in this new scheme?**

A Yes, your application will be banded in priority order that will include the requirement for an approved Property Inspection and you will be able to express an interest in advertised properties.

Q 8. **When will choice based lettings go live?**

A The 'Finding a Home' scheme is currently under development and we will be launching the service early in 2010. There will be a dedicated area in Marmion House reception where properties will be advertised and portals will be available for you to use to complete an on line application form and express an interest in properties. We will continue to provide you with information throughout the development phase.

Finding a Home - Feedback Questionnaire.

Please complete this 10-point questionnaire; it should take no longer than 15 minutes to do and send it to us in the pre paid envelope. The closing date for feedback is 30 November 2009. Your opinions are important to us and will help us agree any amendments to this draft policy and will tell us what other information you need to know.

Name:

Address:

(Please tell us your name and address so we can answer any queries you may have).

1. Do you agree that choice based lettings will make it easier for customers to choose to where they want to live?

Strongly agree Agree No view Disagree Strongly disagree

2. Are there any housing needs that you feel have not been considered.

Yes No

If yes, please explain what they are:

3. Do you think there are any of the housing needs are placed in too high a band?

Yes No

if yes please specify and suggest a band:

4. Do you think any of the housing needs are placed in too low a band?

Yes No

If Yes, please specify and suggest a band:

5. Do you agree that the banding system will give priority to those most in need of housing?

Strongly agree Agree No view Disagree Strongly disagree

6. Do you think how to apply has been explained in enough detail?

Yes No

If No, please tell what do you think is unclear:

continued overleaf

7. Have you any suggestions how we can give applicants extra support?

Yes No

If yes, please tell us your suggestions:

8. Do you think this policy summary has been useful?

Very useful Fairly useful Not at all useful

9. Is there any more information about choice based lettings you would like to know?

Yes No

If yes please tell us about any information you would like us to send you:

**10. After having read this policy summary is there any thing else you wish to tell us?
Please add your comments here**

Equality Monitoring

We want to make sure that everyone who uses our services is treated equally. Answers to the following questions will tell us more about our customers. Any information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be used only to help us improve our services.

You do not have to fill this in but it will help us if you do so. Please choose and select your reply.

Ethnic origin:

White: British / Irish/ other White / please specify.....

Mixed: White & Black Caribbean / White & Black African / White & Asian/ other mixed/ please specify.....

Asian or Asian British: Indian / Pakistani / Bangladeshi / other Asian /please specify.....

Black or Black British: Caribbean / African / other Black /please specify.....

Chinese or other ethnic group: Chinese / other ethnic group / please specify.....

Traveller: Gypsy / Romany / Irish / Other / please specify.....

Gender: Male / female / transgender / trans sexual

Sexual orientation: heterosexual / lesbian or gay / Bisexual / prefer not to say

Age: 16-19 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60-69 / 70-79 / 80+ over

Marital Status: single / married / civil partnership / widowed / partner or co-habiting / divorced

Religion of belief: Christian (including Church of England / Roman Catholic/other denomination)

Muslim / Judaism / Jewish / Hinduism / Sikhism / Buddhism / other / no religion or belief.

Do you consider yourself to be disabled? Yes / No

(The Disability Discrimination Act defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities)

If Yes, please provide details of your disability: Physical impairment / communication or speech impairment / mental health / hearing impairment / visual impairment / learning difficulty or disability / long term illness or health condition

Thankyou

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, which we aim to use to help us to develop the Finding a Home service.

If you wish to discuss the above further please do not hesitate to contact any of the lead officers:

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Email: Joanne-Mallaband@tamworth.gov.uk
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Notes

**If you require this document in another format or language please call
01827 709709 or email enquiries@tamworth.gov.uk**

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