

# HomeSelecta: Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings

## Allocation Policy for Cross-Authority Lettings

### 1. Introduction

This policy has been agreed between the following local housing authorities: Guildford Borough Council, Hart District Council, Rushmoor Borough Council and Waverley Borough Council (“the partner authorities”) to facilitate cross-boundary mobility via the Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

### 2. Principles

The principle of the Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme is that each partner authority agrees to offer an agreed proportion of available properties each year to applicants on any of the partner authorities housing registers. These properties will be let in accordance with a common allocation policy. Each partner will continue to let the remaining majority of its properties through its own allocation scheme details of which are available on the individual partners’ websites.

### 3. Information Sharing

Each partner authority will seek the express permission of housing applicants applying to join their housing register to share personal information about the applicant, and any members of their household expected to reside with them, with the other partner authorities and housing associations to whom nominations may be made. However, information may be shared about the individual and their history irrespective of whether their consent has been obtained where:

- It is in accordance with the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Section 115);
- There is a serious threat to the other party’s staff or contractors;
- Information is relevant to the management or support duties of the partner authority or housing association.

Each partner will comply in all respects with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### 4. Equalities & Diversity

The partnership, through each individual partner authority's own Equalities and Diversity Policy and Procedures, will ensure that it does not discriminate against any person on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, disability nationality, gender, sexuality (lesbians/gay men/transsexuals), age, class, appearance, religion, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal convictions, being HIV positive or having AIDS, or any other matter which causes any person to be treated with injustice.

#### 5. Allocation Criteria

Any applicant who has been accepted onto the housing register of one of the partner authorities is eligible to bid for properties identified for cross-boundary mobility moves that are suitable for their household size. This includes applicants who are on the housing register of the local authority that is advertising the property.

The applicant with the earliest original application date will normally be offered the property, subject to meeting the following requirement:

- The applicant has an identified housing need (this will be determined by whether they meet one of the reasonable preference categories set out in s167- (2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).

Reasonable Preference Categories (s167 (2) Housing Act 1996)	Explanation of reasonable preference categories including examples <i>(The examples given are not exhaustive)</i>
People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act));	This includes people who are intentionally homeless & those who are not in priority need.
People who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under s190- (2), s193- (2) or s195- (2) of the 1996 Act (or under s65 (2) or s68 (2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under s192- (3) of the 1996 Act.	This is where the local housing authority has completed its enquiries and is satisfied that the household is eligible for assistance and is homeless, or threatened with homelessness.
People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.	Examples include property in disrepair; property lacking basic amenities; sharing living room, kitchen, bathroom/toilet; poor internal or external arrangements; overcrowding; under-occupation; lack of access to a garden for children; children

	living in flats or maisonettes above ground floor and insecurity of tenure.
People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to a disability)	These criteria may apply to any member of the household. They include a mental illness or disorder; physical or learning disability; chronic or progressive medical conditions; infirmity due to old age; the need to give or receive care; the need to recover from the effects of violence or threats of violence, or physical, emotional or sexual abuse; young people at risk; people with behavioural difficulties; the need for adapted housing and/or extra facilities, improved heating, sheltered housing or ground floor accommodation on medical grounds or the need to be near friends/relatives or medical facility on medical grounds.
People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others)	This includes people who need to be nearer to their support networks, for example a relative or carer or where an applicant wishes to move to be nearer to their employment.

### Additional Preference

In exceptional cases a partner authority may identify a case on their housing register that warrants a higher priority for a cross-boundary mobility move than it would be awarded using the standard date order allocation method set out above. Such cases may, for example, include an applicant fleeing domestic violence; victims of hate crime or racial harassment. The partner authority should consider whether the following criteria have been met when deciding whether to award additional preference:

- The applicant or a member of their household has been assessed by the partner authority, in conjunction with other appropriate agencies, as being in serious risk of harm if they continue to reside in the borough of the partner authority.
- Other agencies working with the applicant support the applicant's urgent need to move out of the borough in which they are resident.
- All other housing options have been explored and are either inappropriate or to the detriment of the applicant or other members

of their household, for example where they have a secure or assured tenancy and a move to alternative accommodation would result in a loss of that security.

Where additional preference is awarded this will be subject to a time limit of 3 months. This will be subject to review by the partner authority on whose housing register they are on at the end of the 3-month period and may be extended depending on the circumstances of the case.

Factors-, which will be taken into account-, include any change of circumstances, whether suitable properties have become available that the applicant could have successfully bid for, and if a property that has been offered has been refused, the suitability of the offer and the applicant's reason(s) for refusal.

Where an applicant is awarded additional preference their application will be placed above those in the shortlist who meet the reasonable preference criteria. If there is more than one case that has been awarded additional preference in a shortlist for a property the case with the earliest original application date will be awarded the highest priority.

If such an applicant bids for a property that is deemed to be inappropriate, for example by virtue of its proximity to where they are currently resident, the partner authority whose property it is may decide not to offer them the property following consultation with the partner authority whose housing register they are on, and with other agencies working with the applicant.

#### No Preference

Where there are no applicants for the property who meet the reasonable preference or additional preference criteria, the partner authority advertising the property may decide to offer the property to an applicant who has no preference. The applicant with no preference with the earliest original application date will be considered first.

#### Other Considerations

- The partner authority that has advertised the property will also consider which households "best fit" the property by comparing the size of the property with the number of people on the application
- If the property has features-, which are best suited to a particular applicant, for example it is ground floor or has disabled adaptations, priority will be given to those applicants requiring those features
- The provisions of any local lettings policy that is in place for the property advertised.

## 6. Lettings Targets

In order to ensure that there is a fair distribution between transferring applicants and housing needs applicants, and that transferring applicants-, who may have been on the housing register for a longer period of time do not dominate the cross-boundary mobility moves, a target for each will be set. This target will be two-thirds of lettings to go to housing needs applicants and one-third to transfer applicants. This will be reviewed quarterly by the partnership.

## 7. Properties to be Included in the Scheme

Each partner authority agrees to offer 10% of its available properties in each year to applicants on any of the partner authorities housing registers.

### General Principles

- Include both Council and Registered Social Landlord properties
- Exclude new-build properties unless specifically agreed as part of a nomination sharing agreement e.g. the Aldershot Urban Extension. (See Appendix 1: Blackwater Valley Nomination Sharing Agreement)
- Exclude vacancies that occur in settlements that have less than 10 social housing units
- Exclude properties that are provided under Rural Exception Site policies and which are subject to any specific requirements to meet local housing needs under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.
- Partner authorities are encouraged, but not obliged, to include properties adapted for the disabled. These may be advertised when the vacancy first occurs, or later where it has not been possible to identify a suitable applicant from the partner's own housing register.
- Any other exclusion agreed by the partnership.

### Number of each Property Type to be Included

The exact number and type of each property to be included will be agreed annually by the partners and will be based on the stock profile and vacancy rate for each property type for the previous 3 years. In future years the proportion of properties may take into account the rate of population growth of the different local authority areas.

These figures will be the minimum number of properties to be identified for cross-boundary mobility moves. Each partner may choose, if they wish, to include additional properties e.g. hard to let sheltered bed-sit flats.

It is up to each partner to select the properties that are to be identified for cross-boundary mobility moves. However, low demand or less popular properties would not be expected to be overrepresented.

### Timing of Properties to be Included

In order to ensure as even a distribution as possible of properties available for cross-boundary mobility moves over the course of each year, a target has been set that each partner will provide 25% of such properties each quarter.

### Monitoring & Evaluation

The outcome of each cross-boundary mobility move will be monitored by the partnership on a quarterly basis and corrective action proposed, if required, where an imbalance exists between properties advertised by each partner and cross-boundary mobility moves achieved.

## 8. Eligibility for Properties According to Size

Each authority will allocate properties in accordance with their own allocation matrices set out in their own allocation policy.

## 9. Lettings Processes

### Advertising through CBL

- Each partner authority will identify properties to be advertised as available for cross-boundary mobility moves in accordance with Section 7 above.
- The partner authority or housing association landlord will prepare an advert for these properties to be included in the next available weekly cycle. Each cycle will commence on Wednesday at midnight and close on Sunday at midnight in each week of the year.
- The advert will contain a photograph of either the particular property in question, if considered appropriate, or a photograph of a similar property type, or if no photograph is available the landlord's logo; a description of the property; other details including the weekly rent and any other charges and eligibility criteria as required by the Novalet software. It is the advertising landlord's responsibility to ensure that a photograph is provided if at all possible and that the information is accurate and complete.
- The partner authority or housing association landlord will set the requirements that the successful applicant must fulfill, for example with regard to age criteria or the need for particular features of the property, such as disabled adaptations.
- When advertising a property the partner authority must ensure that the minimum and maximum bedroom size fields are set so that applicants on

all the partner authority housing registers that would meet the required eligibility criteria for that property size are able to bid for it.

### Bidding For Properties

- Applicants may make a combined total of 3 bids in any one advertising cycle for properties advertised by the partner authority on whose housing register they are on and properties that are advertised for cross-boundary mobility moves.
- Any applicant who has been accepted onto the housing register of one of the partner authorities is eligible to bid for properties identified for cross-boundary mobility moves that are suitable for their household size, provided that they have not already accepted the offer of any other property.
- Applicants will be able to bid through the following mechanisms: -
  - Online via the website
  - Automated telephony system
  - SMS text messaging
- Bids must be made before the deadline shown in the advertisement otherwise the bid will not count.
- It is recognised that there will be applicants who have support needs and may need assistance with accessing or using the bidding system. Each partner authority will have in place their own mechanisms for providing the level of support required by the individual applicants.

### Shortlisting

- After the close of bidding the partner authority that has advertised the property will review the shortlist and decide which applicant is eligible to be offered the property in accordance with this policy.
- If the partner authority that has advertised the property does not have sufficient information on which to base a decision they may ask for the partner authority on whose housing register the applicant was registered to provide additional information either by telephone or through the completion of a pro forma. This should be completed electronically and sent back by e-mail within 1 working day.
- It is the responsibility of the partner authority advertising the property to carry out their own verification checks in accordance with their own policy. If the partner authority wishes to visit the applicant to verify their circumstances they will need to make the necessary arrangements to do so themselves or seek the co-operation of the local authority in whose area the applicant is resident.

- If an applicant does not meet the verification criteria of the partner authority advertising the property they will be considered to be ineligible to be offered the property. The partner authority will overlook the applicant and move onto the next applicant on the shortlist. In doing so they will be responsible for advising, at the very least, the highest placed applicant that they are not eligible for the property and the reason for this.

#### Offer

- Having identified the applicant that is eligible for an offer the partner authority will contact the applicant to invite them to view the property.
- Following the viewing the applicant will be required to confirm whether or not they wish to accept the property. The timescale for this will be based on the normal timescale used by the partner authority advertising the property.
- If the applicant accepts the property they will be invited to sign for the tenancy. If the applicant refuses the property the next eligible person is selected. An applicant will not be penalised for refusing a property.
- If an applicant who accepts a property is on the housing register of another partner authority the partner authority that advertised the property will inform the applicant's current partner authority and housing association landlord, where they are a tenant of a housing association, of the tenancy start date within 1 working day of it being agreed.
- At the end of each month each partner authority will compile a list of all applicants housed under the common allocation policy during the last month and forward this by e-mail to the other partner authorities. This is to ensure that these applicants are shown as housed on all partner authorities' housing registers that they are on.
- Once a tenancy start date has been agreed the partner authority that advertised the property may request the applicant's file from the partner authority on whose housing register they are on. The file will be provided within 10 working days of this request.

### 10. Appeals Process

An applicant has a right to request a review of the following decisions: -

- That they are ineligible for an offer. This request will be made to the partner authority that has advertised the property. An officer senior to the officer making the original decision and who was not involved in making the decision will carry out any such reviews.
- That they were not offered the property having successfully bid for it. This request will be made to either the partner authority or the landlord of the property advertised depending on who is responsible for making the decision not to offer the property.

Any request for review relating to the individual partner authorities' allocation schemes will be dealt in accordance with their own policy

The procedure for carrying out a review will be in accordance with each individual partner authority or landlords own procedures and timescales, providing they meet the requirements of the relevant legislation or code of guidance.