

The London Borough of Bromley

Draft Housing Allocation Scheme

2010¹

(NB: Note for PDS committee: Whilst the full draft policy has been included for reference, the actual scheme detail covering the proposed revisions is covered between pages 14 & 32, with the priority bandings set out on pages 30&31)

¹ All sections will be numbers and formatted through plain English etc once all consultation feedback has been received and necessary amendments made to reach the final version.

Appendix:

Page 3	Introduction Devising an Allocation Scheme
Page 4	Aims of the Allocation Scheme
Page 5	Partnership Working
Page 6	Equality, Diversity and Accessibility
Page 8	Statement on Choice Rights of the Customer
Page 9	What do we Expect from you?
Page 10	Requesting, Sharing and Verifying Information
Page 11	Data Protection Supporting the Community: Tackling Unacceptable and Antisocial Behaviour
Page 12	Lettings Plans
Page 13	The Housing Register
Page 14	The Reasonable Preference Categories
Page 15	The Local Preference Categories
Page 16	Out of Borough Applicants Who is Ineligible for Inclusion on the Housing Register?
Page 18	Who is Eligible to go on the Housing Register? Who can be Included on Your Application?
Page 19	Who can't be Included on Your Application? Separated Households
Page 20	Financial Resources: Income and Savings Making Your Housing Situation Worse Assessing Your Application
Page 21	Bedroom Requirements Under Occupiers
Page 22	Overcrowding Homelessness
Page 23	Medical Need
Page 25	Adapted Accommodation Housing Association Decants
Page 26	Insanitary Housing Conditions Welfare and Social Grounds
Page 28	Those Owed a Duty by the Local Authority Participating in Employment, Volunteering or Training
Page 29	The Bands
Page 32	Allocations Outside of the Banding System Advertising Homes on Bromley Homeseekers
Page 34	Your Bid
Page 35	When Bidding Closes Withdrawing a Property
Page 36	Bypassing a Bid Shortlisting
Page 37	Turning Down a Property
Page 38	Direct Offers

Page 39	Publishing Results
	Reviews and Cancellations
Page 42	Complaints, Compliments and Comments
Page 43	Service Standards
Page 45	Glossary

Introduction

In the introduction of “Fair and Flexible; statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (Dec 2009)” it states that;

‘Social rented housing is an asset of great significance to the country, to local communities, to families and to individual people. It provides an essential part of the welfare safety net that supports many of the most vulnerable in our society. It provides a firm foundation, with the security and stability that can help people to overcome disadvantage and to build successful lives for themselves and their families. And it can help to create prosperous, healthy local communities, as part of a balanced housing market.’

The guidance also goes on to acknowledge the continued and unprecedented rise in demand for housing which far exceeds the available supply and recognises the importance of robust and transparent Housing Allocation Schemes in ensuring that the allocation of social housing is conducted fairly and takes account of both national and local pressures.

Within Bromley it is also true that the demand for and, indeed, need for social housing far exceeds the available supply. It is therefore essential that the best use is made of all available housing stock and that those who apply for housing assistance are made aware of all the housing options that are available to them as, in reality, social housing alone is not in sufficient supply to meet the overwhelming needs of all those who would seek to acquire it.

Devising an Allocation Scheme and the Legal Framework

This scheme has been drafted in accordance with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.

The introduction of this scheme was conducted in conjunction with customer consultation which took the form of a series of focus groups attended by representatives from:

- Housing Associations
- The Voluntary Sector
- The Probation Service
- The General Public
- The Local Authority

Full details regarding the customer consultation can be found at (add direct link)

In addition this Scheme has formally been approved by the Executive Portfolio Holder for Adult and Community Services.

In framing the Scheme due consideration has been given to the following;

- Fair and flexible; statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (Dec 2009)
- Allocation of Accommodation: Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities (Nov 2002)
- Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities (Aug 2008)
- The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England (Apr 2010)
- Where are Tomorrow's Heartlanders? Unlocking the Potential of Social Housing (Jan 2010)
- Housing Allocations – Members of the Armed Forces Circular (Apr 2009)
- Allocations and Local Flexibility (Feb 2010)
- The London Housing Strategy (Feb 2010)
- The London Borough of Bromley Homelessness Strategy

Working in accordance with the Housing and Residential services Division's mission statement for 2010-2012

The mission statement for the Housing and Residential Services Division sets out, through all areas of work, to:

- Maximise the delivery of good quality affordable housing.
- Improve the standards, energy efficiency and accessibility in housing across all tenures.
- Provide housing advice and solutions to prevent homelessness and enable self-help wherever possible to resolve housing need.
- Promote choice and independence through clear and realistic housing options and support.
- To engage in proactive liaison and negotiation with landlords, owner occupiers and tenants to ensure the best use of housing stock to meet a range of diverse needs.
- Target resources to those most in need and to properties in the poorest condition.

Aims of the Housing Allocation Scheme

The Housing Allocation Scheme aims to:

- Ensure that those in the greatest need of housing assistance, as outlined in both the reasonable and local preference categories, have the greatest opportunity to secure it;
- Allow for the greatest degree of choice possible in the allocation of social housing;

- Manage expectations regarding the availability of social housing and promote awareness of alternative housing options and solutions.
- Promote independence and provide fair access to our services regardless of race, gender, disability, age, religion, nationality, social background or sexuality;
- Minimise the use of temporary accommodation, particularly shared or bed and breakfast type dwellings;
- Help contribute to the development of sustainable communities;
- Encourage long term and consistent partnership working on a local and sub-regional level.
- Make best use of all available social housing stock.

Partnership working

Bromley Council has had no housing stock of its own since 1992. As a result we have continued to work in partnership with a variety of organisations in order to ensure the fair and equitable allocation of social housing within our borough.

The Housing Allocation Scheme and the housing register have been developed in conjunction with a number of partners and interested parties, which include;

- Council Members including the Policy, Development and Scrutiny Committee and the Portfolio Holder.
- Housing Portfolio Holder
- London Borough of Bromley services including;
 - Housing and Residential Services
 - Children and Young People
 - Adult Care Commissioning
 - Extra Care Housing
 - Libraries
- Representatives from the voluntary / advocacy sector
- NWMS - National Witness Mobility Service (see page 11)
- MAPPA - Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (see page 12)
- RSL's (see below)
- SELHP (see below)

Registered Social Landlords (RSL's also known as Housing Associations)

RSL's, also known as Housing Associations, are landlords who own and manage social housing stock within the borough. A list of all partner RSL's can be found on the Bromley Homeseekers website. In developing a joint allocation scheme and locally managed housing register we aim to make the process of applying for accommodation, assessment and access to housing options equitable, efficient and transparent.

Sub-Regional Working: The South East London Housing Partnership

The London Borough of Bromley also works in partnership on a sub-regional level with;

- The London Borough of Bexley
- The London Borough of Greenwich
- The London Borough of Lewisham
- The London Borough of Southwark

Through this partnership we endeavour to provide greater opportunity for cross-borough mobility as well as work together to promote best practice across the sub region.

Equality, Diversity and Accessibility

In compiling the allocations scheme we have carried out an equalities impact assessment to ensure that all customers regardless of race, gender, disability, age, religion, nationality, social background or sexuality have equal and fair access to the services we provide. A copy of the full assessment can be found at **(add link)**

In order to ensure that everyone is able to access housing advice and assistance and, where eligible, bid for housing through Bromley Homeseekers we provide the following:

The Bromley Homeseekers website

- The website complies with the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative and has been built to be accessible to those who are hard of hearing, visually impaired or who have difficulty using a mouse. It is compatible with popular screen readers and can be navigated easily using a series of keyboard shortcuts.
- For those that have difficulty reading, have limited vision or for those for whom English is not a first language the Bromley Homeseekers website has Read-Speaker technology. By clicking on the Read-Speaker icon the information on the page will be played through your PC's speakers.
- For those with visual impairments the website has been designed to allow you to select the colour scheme that you find easiest to view such as black on white or white on blue.

Literature

- Information is available to download from the Bromley Homeseekers and London Borough of Bromley websites.
- Letters and documents can be translated to a language of your choice if English is not your first language.

- We provide quick guides which show you how to bid online, over the phone or via text message.

Access to the internet

We know that not everyone has access to a computer and the internet. There are a number of places across the borough that people can go to in order to access the internet for free. Whilst a full list of internet access points is available on the Bromley Homeseekers website listed below are some of the places within the Bromley Borough that you can visit:

- Libraries **(add link)**
- Council offices **(add link)**
- Community learning shops **(add link)**
- Advocacy offices **(add link)**
- Housing Association offices **(add link)**

For those who have never used a computer before or who want a quick refresher course the libraries also offer free training on how to access the internet. Some branches also offer more specific Bromley Homeseekers training. All training can be offered on either a one to one or group basis.

Advice and Assistance

You can get housing advice and assistance using Bromley Homeseekers from a number of different sources such as:

- The Housing Solutions Staff at the London Borough of Bromley
- The Library
- Your local Community Learning Shop
- Your landlord (if you are a housing association tenant)
- Advocacy Centres

The assistance offered may vary.

If you approach the Housing Solutions Team at the London Borough of Bromley the assistance we can offer will include:

- Help to fill in the online form either over the phone or by appointment in person.
- Providing advice and information regarding the Housing Register, Bromley Homeseekers and all other housing options.
- Assistance with bidding. The Housing Solutions team are happy to explain the bidding system and to explain to you how to make the most of your weekly bidding entitlement. For those who, having explored

every available option, are unable to use the system to bid we can also utilise an automated bidding service.

- Access to translators. This includes British sign language.

Statement on Choice

The Council is committed to offering choice in the allocation of social housing. In order to provide choice we will ensure that, wherever possible, all properties, including sheltered and adapted homes, are advertised through the Bromley Homeseekers website. By exception we reserve the right not to advertise, or withdraw from advertising, a property that is required in order to proceed with a specific allocation. This will include, for example, emergency or public protection allocations. Any such allocation would be undertaken at the discretion of the Housing Needs Team in accordance with this Scheme.

Restricting choice

Whilst we will offer as much choice as possible there are instances where an applicant's choice may be restricted. These include:

In instances of public protection - See Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

Direct offers – see page 38

Rights of the Customer

In accordance with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 s.167 (4) this allocation scheme has been framed to ensure that a customer has the right to request information to enable them to assess:

- How their application is likely to be treated under the scheme. In particular whether they are likely to be regarded within the reasonable and local preference categories.
- Whether a home appropriate to their needs is likely to be made available to them and, if so, how long they can expect to wait to secure a successful move.

Furthermore, through the allocation scheme we will ensure that customers are:

- Treated fairly, with respect and without prejudice.
- Notified in writing of any decision made regarding their application for re-housing and the grounds on which that decision was reached.

- Given the opportunity to appeal against decisions made in respect of their application. For further information regarding reviews and appeals please see page 39

What do we expect from you?

In this allocation scheme we will outline what you can expect from us but there are also some things that we expect from you.

Honesty

We will be honest with you. We will keep you informed of the progress of your application and we will explain any decisions that we make including how we made them. In turn we expect you to be honest about your circumstances so that we can fairly assess your housing need and ensure that you receive the right housing advice to suit you. Social housing is in incredibly short supply and we will do everything that we can to ensure that best use is made of it.

It is an offence to obtain, or attempt to obtain, a tenancy by deception. S.171 of the Housing Act 1996 makes it an offence to knowingly or recklessly provide or withhold information.

You must:

- Provide all information that is, or may be, relevant to your application for re-housing at the point that you apply.
- Advise us of any changes in your circumstances. This includes, but is not restricted to;
 - any changes to your address including change of tenure
 - the birth of a child
 - the removal of someone from your application
 - the addition of someone to your application

If we discover that you have supplied false information or have failed to provide us with information that is relevant to your application in order to gain accommodation we will immediately cancel your application. If you have obtained accommodation through the housing register and it is discovered that you have supplied false information or failed to provide us with information that would have been relevant to your ability to secure that accommodation we will work with your landlord to end your tenancy.

² NB 'see page references & add links will be for hyper links to relevant information/pages for the final on-line version.

In accordance with S.171 of the Housing Act 1996 anyone found guilty of the above is also liable to be prosecuted and/or fined up to £5000.

Courtesy

We will always be polite to you and we will treat you with respect. We ask that you treat our staff in the same way and verbal or physical abuse will not be tolerated. Anyone using abusive, racist or derogatory language will be politely asked to stop. Failure to do so will result in a written warning. Should this behaviour continue we will either only correspond with you in writing or may instead look to suspend or cancel your application depending on the severity of your actions.

Requesting, Sharing and Verifying Information

In addition to the information provided by the customer the Council may seek further information or supporting evidence from a variety of third parties. In completing the online application form the customer gives the Council permission to share information and make further enquiries in order to correctly assess their application.

In order to offer you appropriate advice and to assess your application, it may also be necessary to contact those people or organisations whose details you have provided or other relevant parties whose details come to light during our enquiries. This may include:

- Cross checking the information you have given against the full register of electors of the London Borough of Bromley or any other Council.
- Cross checking the information you have given with other Council sections e.g. Housing Benefits, Council Tax and other Council and Benefit Agencies.
- Contacting current and previous landlords
- Sharing information with partner Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations) who manage all social rented housing in Bromley.
- Cross checking with data matching companies e.g. Experian or other credit reference agencies. These agencies will record details of any search made whether or not this application proceeds.
- Other third parties considered relevant to your application

You may also be asked to provide further evidence in order to verify the information that you give us. This includes but is not restricted to;

- Photographic proof of ID (passport or driving licence)
- Proof of any benefits claimed (child benefit, income support, job seekers allowance, family tax credit, DWP)
- Birth certificates for each household member included on the application

- National insurance number
- Proof of your current and/or previous address (utility bill, bank statement, Council tax payment book)
- Proof of income (pay slips for four weeks if paid weekly or last two months if paid monthly) or a letter from your employer confirming your annual salary
- Passport size photo
- Immigration documents
- Information regarding property ownership

Failure to provide this information when required to do so may result in a delay in the assessment or the suspension of your application. Failure to provide the necessary information at the point of offer may also mean that you are not successful in securing a home.

If you fail to provide information that is requested in order to complete an assessment of your housing need your application will be cancelled. You would need to submit a new application if you wanted to reapply to join the housing register.

Where appropriate any information that you provide may be shared with registered housing providers and prospective landlords.

Data Protection

The information that you provide is required for the proper conduct of the Council's housing function and may be held on a computer or paper file which you have the right to access. We are under a duty to protect the public funds we administer and to this end may use the information we have obtained and that you have provided within this authority for the prevention and detection of fraud. We may also share this information with other bodies administering public funds solely for these purposes. For information regarding access to records please see (add link)

Supporting the Community: Tackling Unacceptable and Anti Social Behaviour.

The safety of the local community and those applying for rehousing is a key consideration in any allocations scheme. The Council and its partners continue to work together in order to provide a safe and secure environment for its residents to live, work and prosper in.

In supporting the community, through the allocation scheme, those found guilty of unacceptable or anti social behaviour will be ineligible for inclusion onto the housing register. For further details see "Who is ineligible for inclusion on the housing register?"

National Witness Mobility Service (NWMS)

In order to assist the national police force to tackle serious crime and to support witnesses in the legal process the council works in partnership with colleagues in the National Witness Mobility Service (NWMS) and will, as required, accept referrals from this source. Such cases will have been assessed and verified by the NWMS managers and referrals will only be accepted with the agreement of a member of the council's Housing Needs Team. There are particular confidentiality considerations for such cases and no personal information will be taken until the applicant accepts a direct offer of accommodation in the Borough. Any proposed offer will be checked for suitability by the NWMS before the offer is made and details of successful lettings may not subsequently be made available for public consumption.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

Equally, if an applicant is shown to be a danger to themselves or to others then appropriate safeguards will be put into place. This may include preventing the applicant from bidding for accommodation, making a direct offer and/or identifying the risk factors on the application and sharing this information with relevant named parties or partner services. Applicants within this category may include, amongst others, those who are referred via the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) service. Under MAPPA the local authority has a duty to co-operate and when such cases are referred to us a judgement will be made to establish if the client meets the eligibility criteria as set out in this allocation scheme and that they are suitable for general needs social housing. Otherwise, such clients may fall within the category of those who are ineligible for housing. Offers made to MAPPA households will be verified as suitable with the appropriate authorities (normally the police and/or HAWK officer) before being made.

Lettings Plans

Lettings plans are an important tool in meeting allocation targets. They are agreed between the Council and partner RSL's.

An annual lettings plan will primarily give priority to the Council's statutory housing allocation responsibilities whereas a local lettings plan is designed to incorporate, albeit to a lesser degree, local priorities and non statutory responsibilities. Whilst both plans are reviewed annually it is acceptable for specific local lettings plans to be put in place for a limited time frame in order, for example, to facilitate moves to a particular new build development.

The Annual Lettings Plan

In agreement with partner RSL's and agencies an Annual Lettings Plan is produced to ensure that we meet our statutory responsibilities in accordance with letting accommodation. The figures are set in accordance with the number of vacant properties expected to become available within the following twelve month period. The plan is regularly reviewed throughout the year and may be adjusted to respond to changing circumstances.

Specific Local Lettings Plan

The London Borough of Bromley may agree a local lettings plan with individual RSL's for specific areas or developments to reflect local circumstances and to facilitate viable and sustainable communities. Any local lettings plan will reflect considerations such as the social mix of residents within the block, estate or area and will be outlined within our nominations agreement. All locally agreed lettings plans will be subject to an equalities impact assessment and may take in to account the following factors:

- child density (the number of children in an area)
- age range
- vulnerability of tenants
- access to resources (such as facilities for vulnerable people, schooling or healthcare)
- community stability and cohesion
- areas of low demand

Suspension of the lettings plan in exceptional circumstances

In the event of a large scale emergency affecting housing or the need for housing within the borough the Housing Needs Team may vary, suspend or review the lettings plan wholly or in part.

Equality within a lettings plan

In accordance with the equalities impact assessment whilst the lettings plan is used to support local and Government agendas within housing it will not be used to discriminate against those requiring housing. Any exclusions or preferences will be specified with the agreement of the Housing Needs Team and will be subject to internal review.

The Housing Register

What is a Housing Register and why is it needed?

A housing register is a way of recording the details of households who have applied to the Council for rehousing. Data from a housing register can be used to monitor trends, assess demand and provide grounds for future housing development and the creation of tailored housing advice services.

The London Borough of Bromley administers a housing register in order to fairly manage the needs of those eligible for re-housing by ensuring that information is held in priority and date order.

Whilst having a housing register helps to organise the details of those requiring housing it does not in itself increase the number of properties that become available to be let each year. Unfortunately there is insufficient social housing available to meet the needs of all those that approach us for

assistance. Only those whose circumstances are outlined within the reasonable and local preference categories will be given a priority on the housing register and will be eligible to bid for homes advertised on the Bromley Homeseekers website. This is necessary to manage the expectations of both those able to secure a move via the housing register and those who will need to explore other housing options in order to move to another property.

For those not included on the housing register in Bands A-D, advice and access to alternative housing options will be provided by housing staff, through literature and on the London Borough of Bromley and Bromley Homeseekers websites.

How is priority determined?

For those included on the housing register priority is determined in accordance with the Reasonable and Local Preference categories.

The current statutory reasonable preference categories are set out in the Housing Act 1996 s.167(2). These categories were rationalised in the Homelessness Act 2002 (and further refined by the Housing Act 2004) to ensure that they are directly based on housing need. This means that any allocation scheme must be framed to give reasonable preference to applicants who fall within the categories set out in s.167(2), over those who do not. While local authorities must demonstrate that, overall, reasonable preference is given to applicants in all the reasonable preference categories; this does not mean that they must give equal weight to each of the reasonable preference categories. Local authorities are able to take into account local pressures both in determining the suitable priority afforded to any reasonable preference category but also through giving reasonable preference to identified local preference categories.

The Reasonable Preference Categories

Listed below are details of each of the categories to which we are required, by law, to give reasonable preference through the allocation scheme.

- People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act); this includes people who are intentionally homeless, and those who do not have a priority need for accommodation
- People who are owed a duty by any local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any local authority under section 192(3) of the 1996 Act³
- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions

³ Explanation of each of these to be added

- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others)

The Local Preference Categories

Listed below are details of each of the locally agreed categories which we will give a degree of preference to through the allocation scheme.

- People who are permanently employed, in training or participating in voluntary work within the borough.
- Housing Association tenants looking to downsize to smaller accommodation (also known as under-occupiers).
- Households identified as part of decant programmes.

In addition to this the Council reserves the right to review the local preference categories in order to:

- Include additional and / or time limited local preference categories to pilot new schemes or to meet the needs of a newly identified priority group.
- Remove or suspend preference to any of the groups listed above if the Housing Needs Team determine that there are sufficient grounds to do so.

Local Connection

We understand that local connection is important when providing access to accommodation and in allocating local resources. However, due to the scarcity of available housing local connection will not in itself warrant a priority on the housing register. In the first instance, priority will always be considered on the grounds of housing need.

Once priority is established we will take account of local connection in determining your eligibility and which band your application should be placed into.

We define local connection as:

- Those who are currently a resident within the borough boundaries and have resided here for 6 of the last 12 months. This does not include those who have been placed in the borough under another local authorities homeless duty.
- Those who are permanently employed or participating in voluntary work within the borough boundaries.

Proof of your residence and/or employment or voluntary status will be required either during the assessment process or at the point that you are successfully shortlisted for accommodation.

Local connection exceptions

In most instances those applying from outside of the borough boundaries will not be included on the housing register. However, certain groups may be subject to further consideration or exemption from the local connection rule. These include:

- Tenants of partner RSL's who require a transfer and have a housing need in accordance with either the Local or Reasonable Preference categories.
- Returning members of the armed forces who have a housing need in accordance with either the Local or Reasonable Preference categories.
- Those referred via a South East London Housing partnership protocol.

Out of Borough Applicants

Anyone currently living outside of the London Borough of Bromley will not normally be eligible for inclusion onto the housing register.

Anyone wishing to apply to the London Borough of Bromley who currently resides outside of the borough boundaries should in the first instance seek the support of their own local authority. If your local authority agrees that you have an urgent need to secure accommodation in the London Borough of Bromley, in accordance with their own allocation scheme, they should submit a letter supporting your application. In most instances we will only agree to assist an applicant with no identified local connection where their own borough is prepared to enter into a reciprocal agreement with us. This means that, if we are able to assist you to secure accommodation, your borough will offer a property (of the same size and type as you require) for advertisement on Bromley Homeseekers in order to benefit a local resident. Applications will not normally be considered for those not supported by their local authority by way of a reciprocal agreement.

Who is Ineligible for Inclusion on the Housing Register?

Those who are guilty of anti social or unacceptable behaviour

Definition of anti social behaviour:

The act of 'engaging in or threatening to engage in conduct causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to a person residing, visiting or otherwise engaging in lawful activity in the locality'

The Housing Act 1996

Behaving in 'a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself'.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Definition of unacceptable behaviour:

Those who are guilty of behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant of an RSL at the time of their application.

The following are examples of what is considered anti social or unacceptable behaviour;

- Noise nuisance;
- Perpetrating domestic violence;
- Racial harassment;
- Intimidation;
- Drug dealing;
- Gang related activities;
- Causing damage to property;
- Rent or mortgage arrears where the wilful actions of the occupier have caused the arrears to accumulate.

You will be ineligible to join the housing register if we are satisfied that you or any member of your household, including children, have a history of or are currently engaging in any of the behaviour outlined above.

In reaching a decision that an applicant is ineligible on the grounds of anti social or unacceptable behaviour we will take into account:

- The circumstances at the time of the application;
- The needs of the household including dependents or medical requirements;
- Relevant supporting information including police or landlords' records, including those of partner RSL's;
- Timescales i.e. is the alleged behaviour current or historical;
- Likelihood of re occurrence;
- Whether or not the behaviour was such that, had the person in question been a secure local authority tenant, a court would have considered it reasonable to grant an outright possession order (under s84 of the Housing Act 1985, Part 1, Schedule 2 excepting Ground 8)

Home Owners

A person who owns their own home will not normally receive a priority on the housing register. They will be offered advice and signposted to suitable agencies in order to resolve their underlying housing difficulties. Only in exceptional circumstances, where a person has a need for rehousing in accordance with the reasonable preference categories and where all other options have been fully explored and ruled out will a person who owns their own home be included onto the housing register. Any outstanding legal interest in their home would have to be disposed of prior to them successfully securing alternative accommodation.

A person or persons subject to immigration control.

All those who are subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 (unless the Secretary of State has stated that they should be eligible for housing) will be excluded from joining the housing register. This includes the following groups:

- Those who have limited leave to enter or remain in the UK, granted on the understanding that they are not entitled to receive public funding;
- Those who have valid leave to enter or remain in the UK, which includes the stipulation that they are not entitled to receive public funding;
- Asylum seekers;
- Those who are not habitually resident in the UK, including certain people who are resident here under sponsorship arrangements;
- Illegal entrants;
- Those who have overstayed their leave;
- Any other person from abroad who the secretary of state has judged ineligible for housing.

Who is Eligible to go on the Housing Register?

Applicants to the Housing Register should be aged 18 years or over. They should be eligible for rehousing in accordance with the scheme guidelines and should be able to manage in independent housing. If a person is aged 16 or 17 they will only be eligible if we accept that we have a duty towards them as a homeless person or if their details have been referred to us by Bromley Children and Families Social Services under their designated powers and agreed procedures.

Who Can be Included on Your Application?

Household members who can be included on your application

- Your partner, providing they are aged 16 or over. This includes married, unmarried and same sex partners.

You will be able to make an application jointly unless we consider that one of you is ineligible or has an interest in another property.

- Close relatives including: parents, siblings, adult children and grandparents.

In order to be included on your application your relative must already be living with you, and have done so on a long term basis and have no interest in any other property. Alternatively they may be included on your application because they are living elsewhere and are no longer able to live independently and require a higher level of care and support.

- Dependent children under the age of 18.

It must be confirmed to our satisfaction that any children included on your application will be residing with you on a permanent basis i.e. more than 50% of a 7 day week.

When considering the residency of children and in order to determine whether or not they are eligible to be included as part of your household we will take into account:

- The benefits and tax credits you receive in respect of your children.
- Confirmation from the Courts regarding residency or parental responsibility.
- Referrals from social services in respect of fostering or adoption placements.
- Where they currently reside.

Who Can't be Included on Your Application?

Household members who cannot be included on your application

- Anyone who does not have recourse to public funds, is an asylum seeker or is not resident in the UK
- Anyone who does not intend to move to any accommodation offered to you

Household members who would not normally be included on your application

- Cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, friends, acquaintances, lodgers, sub-tenants

We will however give individual consideration where there are reasonable grounds for including one of the above on your application.

Separated Households

Separated households at the point of application

If you have included someone on your application who does not currently live with you we will consider that you are a separated household. In order to assess your eligibility and priority on the housing register we will assume that you are living at the address most suited to your needs. Your application will be assessed as if all household members are resident at that one address. When considering which home would be most suitable we will take into account:

- The size of each property
- Any medical needs of the household
- Any proven risk to the household at either location

Financial Resources: Income and Savings

When considering what housing options are available to you we will take into account the incomes, savings and circumstances of all adult members of the household.

Those qualifying within one of the reasonable preference categories will be offered housing options in accordance with their financial circumstances but their priority on the housing register will not be restricted.

For those not qualifying within one of the reasonable preference categories and where we feel that they have sufficient resources to secure accommodation through their own means, priority on the housing register may be restricted and other housing options may instead be suggested.

Making Your Housing Situation Worse

In the event that your actions cause your circumstances to worsen or prevent them from improving we may reduce your priority or cancel your application. In some instances we may choose to disregard any circumstances that you have made worse when assessing your priority. Examples of this are:

- Moving into accommodation that you know to be of a significantly inadequate size for your household in accordance with the bedroom standard outlined within this scheme.
- Failing to allow repairs to your home to be carried out.
- Withholding or failing to make rent or mortgage payments.
- Failing to follow advice given by the Council in order to prevent homelessness.
- Refusing an offer of privately rented accommodation which was made in order to prevent homelessness.

Assessing your Application⁴

All assessments will take into account your needs and the needs of any member of your household in conjunction with the accommodation that you currently occupy or that is available for you to occupy.

Bedroom Requirements

Bedroom requirements, overcrowding and under occupation are assessed in accordance with the following reasonable preference and local preference categories:

- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
- Housing Association Tenants looking to downsize to smaller accommodation (also known as under-occupiers).

How many bedrooms are you eligible for?

Under-occupation and overcrowding are assessed by working out how many rooms your household needs.

If you have more rooms available than your household is assessed to need, you are under-occupying the property.

If you have fewer rooms available than your household is assessed to need, you are overcrowded.

In accordance with Housing Benefit assessments regarding bedroom standards we allow one bedroom for each of the following:

- An adult couple. This includes married, common law, same sex and civil partnership couples.
- Any other adult who is aged 16 or over
- Two children of the same gender until they are 16
- Two children of either gender who are younger than 10
- a single child (someone under 16)
- Pregnancy, where no other children are included as part of the household.

Each person is only counted once in the first group they would come into.

Under Occupiers

⁴ Paragraph regarding automated banding will need to be added once system parameters are defined.

Freeing up family sized and general needs accommodation

We recognise that there is a shortage of affordable family sized accommodation within the borough and we are committed to ensuring that the best use is made of the current housing stock. To this end those under occupying general needs Housing Association accommodation by two or more bedrooms, where a reciprocal agreement is entered into, will be given a priority on the housing register.

Those moving from general needs into sheltered accommodation will also be given a priority, where a reciprocal has been entered into.

We will also give a degree of priority to any housing association tenant downsizing by one bedroom or where no reciprocal has been agreed.

In instances where an under occupied property is in particularly high demand or would meet the needs of a particular, high priority, household we may opt to increase the priority of the under occupied household or may look to make a direct offer in order to facilitate a single or chain move.

Tenants of non partner Housing Associations and other Local Authorities will **only** be considered for a priority on the grounds of under occupation where their landlord agrees to enter into a reciprocal arrangement in respect of their current property.

Overcrowding

Depending on the level of overcrowding you are experiencing you may be offered a priority on the housing register. There are also a number of other housing options that we may offer to the most severely overcrowded households rather than providing them with a priority on the housing register.

Very few 4 bedroom or larger properties become available for letting. As a result larger families may wait many years before they can secure a move into suitably sized accommodation. In such instances we will look at other housing options to alleviate levels of overcrowding. In some instances we may also suggest that a family considers separating the household in order to secure a number of smaller units that become available more readily. For example we suggest that an elderly household member considers sheltered accommodation or that younger members of the household consider seeking accommodation in their own right. In such instances where this accommodation is offered via the housing register we will seek to house the smallest household unit in the first instance and will normally suspend the larger household unit from bidding until a tenancy is secured.

Homelessness

Homelessness is assessed in accordance with the following Reasonable Preference Category:

- People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part VII of the 1996 Act); this includes people who are intentionally homeless, and those who do not have a priority need for accommodation

In the first instance all those who are homeless, threatened with homelessness, fleeing violence, subject to harassment, leaving institutional care or the armed forces will be seen by the Council's Housing Options and Assessments team. They will receive a comprehensive housing options interview in order to discuss their circumstances and to determine the appropriate housing options available to them in order to resolve their housing need.

In most cases the Housing Options and Assessments Team will be able to resolve, delay or prevent homelessness and subsequently no housing register priority will be awarded on the grounds of homelessness.

In the instances where homelessness cannot be prevented the Housing Options and Assessment team will refer an applicant for inclusion onto the housing register in a priority band.

Once a referral is received those who are both unintentionally homeless and in priority need (within the meaning of Part VII of the 1996 Act) will receive a higher priority than those who are intentionally homeless or are not in priority need within the meaning of Part VII of the 1996 Act)

Medical Need

Medical need is assessed in accordance with the following Reasonable Preference category:

- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability

Medical priority will only be considered where the medical needs of you or your household are:

- Made significantly worse by your current property and would be demonstrably improved by a move to alternative accommodation.

Please note that if the condition of your property is aggravating your medical circumstances we will initially look to improve conditions in your home before any medical assessment is undertaken. This will normally require you to work either with your landlord, Care Manager, Occupational Therapist and/or the Council's Residential Services team in order to ensure that the condition or accessibility of your property is acceptable.

Who assesses medical priority?

Ultimately it is the responsibility of the local authority to reach a decision regarding whether or not to award a priority on medical grounds. The decision to award priority will be made by members of the Housing Needs Team in accordance with the allocation scheme.

Physical disabilities, where adapted accommodation is required, will be assessed in conjunction with the Council's Occupational Therapy team.

Physical disabilities, where adapted accommodation is not required, will be assessed at the discretion of the Housing Needs Team.

Learning disabilities will be assessed in conjunction with the Adult Care Commissioning service.

Mental illness will be assessed in conjunction with the Council's Support and Resettlement team.

All other medical conditions will be assessed at the discretion of the Housing Needs Team.

What information is taken into account?

In reaching a decision we **will** take account of:

- Your current accommodation. If your medical circumstances are not made worse by your current home no medical assessment will be undertaken.
- Prognosis. If a move to alternative accommodation would not significantly improve your medical condition no medical assessment will be undertaken.

We **may** contact or seek further advice from third parties such as:

- Independent medical advisers for example Now Medical.
- Specialist medical professionals.
- General Practitioners

We **may** take account of:

- Any supporting medical information that you submit

Applicants should be aware that even if they provide supporting documents stating that a move to alternative accommodation would be essential it is for the local authority to determine the appropriate level of priority in accordance with the allocation scheme.

If it is determined that a particular type of property is required on medical grounds; for example a home with no internal stairs, you will be expected to

bid for accommodation that matches that criteria. If you bid on accommodation that does not meet your required criteria your bid may be bypassed. If you continue to bid on accommodation that does not meet your medical requirements any priority afforded to you on medical grounds will be reviewed and may be removed.

If your medical circumstances improve any priority awarded to you on medical grounds will be reviewed and may be removed.

Adapted Accommodation

Those requiring adapted accommodation are assessed in accordance with the following Reasonable Preference category:

- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability

If you or a member of your household uses a wheelchair and requires a specially adapted home your circumstances will be assessed by the Council's Occupational Therapy Team. You or someone acting on your behalf can complete a self referral by contacting Bromley Social Services Direct (BSSD) on 0208 461 7777.

Once a housing report has been completed we will consider whether or not to award your application a priority on the housing register. See also "who assesses medical priority".

Freeing up adapted accommodation

If someone is occupying fully adapted, wheelchair accessible, housing association accommodation and no longer requires the use of these facilities they may be given a priority on the housing register. Advice may be sought from the Council's Occupational Therapy team in determining the relet suitability of any such property prior to a decision on priority being reached.

Housing Association Decants

Housing Association decants are assessed in accordance with the following Local Preference category:

- Households identified as part of decant programmes.

If you are a tenant of a partner Housing Association and your landlord advises that you need to move as part of a decant programme you will be given a priority on the housing register. The level of priority you receive will depend on the length of time remaining until your property is due for decant.

You will be eligible to bid for the size of accommodation that your household is deemed as requiring in accordance with the allocation scheme. This may be different from the size of property that you are being decanted from.

If you fail to move within the proposed timescales your landlord may request that you be made a direct offer of accommodation. If you then fail to accept the direct offer your landlord may seek to terminate your tenancy.

For further information regarding decants please contact your Housing Association directly.

Insanitary Housing Conditions

People living in insanitary housing conditions are assessed in accordance with the following Reasonable Preference Category:

- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions

If your home is in a state of disrepair you will not normally be awarded a priority on the housing register. The Council's Residential Services Enforcement Team will instead offer you assistance to ensure that your home is maintained to a decent standard and that outstanding repairs are carried out.

If you are a Housing Association tenant your landlord will have published standards that they must meet with regards to property maintenance and condition.

Whether you are a Housing Association or private tenant, if you are experiencing problems relating to disrepair you will need to contact your landlord in the first instance. You will need to explain to them what the problems are and work with them to get the matter resolved.

If your landlord will not engage with you or is not carrying out the appropriate repairs to your home then you can contact the Council's Residential Services Enforcement Team. They will assess your situation, either by speaking to you over the phone or by arranging a home visit and, if necessary, they will work with both you and your landlord to resolve any outstanding issues. You will need to confirm that you have already been in touch with your landlord and that they have failed to resolve the works that are outstanding within a reasonable timescale before seeking assistance to improve the condition of your home.

If you own your own home you are responsible for maintaining it and will not normally be awarded a priority on the housing register. The Council's Residential Services team can offer you advice and assistance as well as details of any current schemes and initiatives to help you maintain and remain in your home.

Priority on the housing register will only be awarded in exceptional circumstances where your home is assessed as having an irresolvable category 1 hazard and where a Prohibition Notice is required or has been sought.

Welfare and Social Grounds

Those requiring a move on welfare and social grounds are assessed in accordance with the following Reasonable Preference Categories:

- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others)

A priority on welfare and social grounds can be considered in two parts. Firstly where you or a person included on your application needs to move to be closer to specialist support or services. For example this could be:

- Needing to move closer to a school that is named as essential in a statement of special educational needs.
- Where support is required from family members or a specialist service to allow you or a person included on your application to continue to live independently.

Secondly a priority on social and welfare grounds can be considered where you need to provide significant care and support to a person not included on your application. For example this could be:

- Caring for an elderly relative in order to allow them to continue to live independently.

When considering whether or not to award a priority on welfare and social grounds there are a number of factors that we will take into consideration these include:

- Bromley is an urban area with extensive and reliable public transport networks. We will look at how long the journey takes via public transport or private vehicle.
- Availability of transport i.e. whether you have access to a private vehicle or use public transport.
- The level of support that is currently provided including details of any care packages and carers allowances.
- The ability of the person offering support to provide it.
- When considering access to a school that is highlighted in a statement of special educational needs we will look at the age of the child/children and how long they will remain at the school in question.

Many families provide assistance and support to their relatives. This can take the form of assisting with shopping, household chores and general emotional support. In order to award welfare and social priority we must be satisfied that the support provided is so significant that, without it, the person in question would be at risk of significant harm or would no longer be able to live independently.

Instead of awarding a priority on the housing register we may instead suggest other housing options that we feel are appropriate to meet the needs of the household.

Those Owed a Duty by the Local Authority

Those owed a duty by the local authority are assessed in accordance with the following Reasonable Preference category:

- People who are owed a duty by any local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any local authority under section 192(3) of the 1996 Act

Referrals may be received by other sections within the local authority. Consideration will also be given to referrals from other local authorities where evidence is submitted to support a move to our borough. These will include, but are not exhaustive of, the following:

- Care leavers
- Those with learning disabilities
- Those approved for fostering or adoption where a home is required to meet the needs of a particular child or children.
- Children in need in accordance with the Children Act 1989.

Participating in Employment, Volunteering or in Training within the Borough.

We will not normally award a priority or allow inclusion onto the housing register solely on the grounds of employment or participating in training or voluntary work. Housing need is always the first and foremost consideration when considering whether or not to award a priority on the housing register.

However, we do feel that it is important that we recognise those that are making a positive contribution to the community either through their current employment and training status or through their commitment to volunteering.

In conjunction with the local lettings plan we propose to advertise a minimum number of good quality homes each financial year where preference is given

to those who are currently in permanent employment, in training or participating in voluntary work within the borough.

Initially, when completing an application, you will need to provide details of the work or training you are participating in. You will also need to keep us updated with any changes to your circumstances as only those currently volunteering, employed or in training, at the time a tenancy is offered, will be considered for properties advertised under this local preference category.

When shortlisting properties advertised in accordance with this local preference category we will consider applicants in the following order:

- Banding
- Date the banding was awarded
- Participation in employment, training or volunteering within the borough.

In order to qualify under this local preference category applicants must have been employed, in training or participating in voluntary work for a minimum of 6 months in order for a bid to be successful.

Those not participating in employment, training or volunteering will have their bids bypassed.

At the point of offer you will need to provide proof that you are employed, in training or are volunteering. Where applicable you will need to provide the following:

- Wage slips for the last 6 months.
- A contract confirming your employment, volunteering or training status over the previous 6 months.
- Contact details for your employer, school/college or voluntary work provider.

All relevant parties will be contacted before you are formally offered accommodation and asked to confirm your status in order to ensure that you qualify for a property under this local preference category.

If we cannot contact the relevant person or organisation or are not satisfied with the information that you have provided you will not be formally offered the property.

If we discover that you have intentionally supplied false information in order to unfairly gain access to accommodation we will either cancel your application or remove any priority afforded to you.

In accordance with S.171 of the Housing Act 1996 anyone found guilty of the above is also liable to be prosecuted and/or fined.

The Bands

Anyone who applies to the housing register will be assessed and placed into one of five bands. The qualifying criteria for each band reflects the level of housing need of the applicant and ranges from urgent to low/not included.

In all cases we will only consider those circumstances that are made worse or prevented from improvement by your current housing situation. All other circumstances will not be considered as part of the assessment of your housing need.

Summary of households likely to be included within each Band

It should be noted that these lists are neither extensive nor conclusive and the examples given merely represent, in outline, those cases likely to accrue a priority. In each case a decision will be made according to the needs of the individual household and the circumstances as they are presented to the Council. As each household's circumstances will vary significantly it is not possible to fully list each scenario in this allocation scheme.

Emergency Band

Very few applicants will qualify for this level of priority. This is an emergency banding and represents those with the most critical and immediate need to move.

- Management Priority Cases, which include:
 - Where there is immediate risk to your life or the life of a member of your household.
 - Failure to move you would result in a severe and significant deterioration in your or a member of your household's physical or mental health to such a degree as to be life threatening or would result in hospital admission.
 - Failure to move you would result in the welfare of any child in within your household being severely prejudiced accordance with the Childrens Act 1989.
 - In instances of public safety as referred through MAPPA or the NWMS
- Under Occupiers who are either:
 - Downsizing by two or more bedrooms
 - Moving from general needs to sheltered accommodation
 - Moving from fully adapted to general needs accommodation
- People living in insanitary housing conditions so severe that a Prohibition Notice has or is in the process of being served.

Gold Band

This represents those households with a high level of housing need where an urgent move is required to significantly improve their quality of life or to free up supported accommodation. It includes:

- Tenants of partner Housing Associations subject to decant proceedings within 12 months.
- London Borough of Bromley referrals for the following households: supported housing move on, leaving care and learning disability.
- People who are owed a duty by any local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any local authority under section 192(3) of the 1996 Act.
- Households who are overcrowded by two or more bedrooms
- Households with severe medical needs including those requiring adapted accommodation and whose current homes are not and cannot be suitably adapted to their needs.

Silver Band

This represents those households with a moderate level of housing need where a move is necessary but not urgent. It includes:

- People who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act);
- Tenants of partner Housing Associations subject to decant proceedings within 24 months.
- People who need to move on welfare grounds to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

Bronze Band

This represents those households with a low level of housing need where a move is desirable but not essential.

- People who are intentionally homeless or homeless but not in priority need (within the meaning of Part VII of the 1996 Act).
- Households who are overcrowded by one bedroom
- Elderly people who are not classed as under occupiers but who wish to move from general needs to sheltered housing.

Not Included

Those with no identified housing need, in accordance with the reasonable and local preference categories or those who are ineligible to join the housing register will not be placed onto the Housing Register

Information regarding not included applicants will be used along with information regarding applicants in the priority Bands to monitor trends and the levels of housing need within the borough. Anyone who is not included on the Housing Register will not be able to bid for accommodation via Bromley Homeseekers.

Priority within a band

Waiting time determines your position within a band. Waiting time begins from the date that your current banding priority was awarded. For example if at the time you applied you were placed into, and have remained in, the Bronze Band your waiting time will be effective from the date of your application. If you were subsequently moved into a higher band your waiting time would begin from the time that your new banding was awarded.

If your banding is reduced and, for example, you move from the Silver to the Bronze Band you will be able to keep the waiting time that you have already built up.

If, as a result of the lettings plan, your waiting time would be increased by moving up a band you can choose for your application to remain in the lower band.

Multiple needs:

Your circumstances may be such that you would qualify for priority under more than one reasonable or local preference category. If this is the case your application will be placed into the highest band as assessed in accordance with your housing needs.

Allocations Outside of the Banding System

There are circumstances where a household's needs are so complex or urgent that they warrant an offer of accommodation outside of the banding system. Such decisions will only be made in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Housing Needs Team. We reserve the right in such instances to either make a direct offer of accommodation or to allow the household to bid for accommodation via Bromley Homeseekers, in an agreed Band, for a specified period of time.

Advertising Homes on Bromley Homeseekers

Bromley Council works in partnership with Housing Associations and other Local Authorities to advertise properties on Bromley Homeseekers. All of the information submitted including details of numbers of bedrooms, property type, available facilities, timescales and adaptations is provided by the landlord. Whilst we will do all that we can to ensure that the information provided is correct Bromley Council does not accept responsibility for any inaccurate information supplied by a Housing Association or other Local Authority.

Property adverts

Properties will be advertised on the Bromley Homeseekers website during the bidding cycle. Details of when the bidding cycle starts and ends can be found on the Bromley Homeseekers website. A property sheet can also be downloaded from the website as required.

Property adverts and the lettings plan

In order to meet the agreed lettings plan, property adverts may specify that priority will be given to a specific reasonable or local preference category household. It may also state that preference will be given to people of a certain age, for example, if the property is categorised as sheltered or that preference will be given to those with a disability, for example, if the property is adapted or suitable for adaptations. Preferences will be clearly outlined in property adverts. When shortlisting accommodation priority will be given to the applicant that best meets the outlined preferences. This will be the case even if they have a lower Band than applicants who placed a bid but did not meet the advert preference criteria. This will be done both to meet the directives of the lettings plan but also to ensure that the best use is made of all available housing stock. In exceptional circumstances the Housing Needs Team may decide that an applicant's circumstances are so severe that their bid will still be considered even if they do not meet the advertised preferences providing that the property is of the correct size for their household. Such decisions will only be made in exceptional circumstances where we believe that failure to consider the households bid would likely result in the loss of life or a severe and significant deterioration in the households circumstances that might otherwise be prevented by the move to the accommodation advertised.

Advertising adapted homes on Bromley Homeseekers

Adapted accommodation will be advertised for bidding on the Bromley Homeseekers website. Preference for adapted accommodation will be given to those that are assessed as requiring such accommodation by the Council's Occupational Therapy team. If an advertised property does not attract bids from those that require such accommodation the Council will seek to contact directly those who have been assessed as requiring adapted accommodation with a view to making a direct offer.

We also reserve the right to make a direct offer of adapted accommodation if either:

- A property has been secured / adapted to meet the needs of a specific household.
- An urgent move is required in order to allow a household to continue to live independently.
- A move is required in order to free up hospital or specialist accommodation.

Homes for people aged 55 and over

Properties are regularly advertised specifically for people aged 55 or over. These are often referred to as sheltered housing. There is sometimes a misconception that sheltered housing provides the same level of support as a care home but this is not the case. People in sheltered housing live independently. The properties are self contained and benefit from their own facilities, some even have their own gardens or balconies. The main benefits of considering sheltered housing managed by a Housing Association are:

- They are affordable
- They offer long term security
- They offer low level support such as access to a carelink button or visiting warden
- Waiting times for sheltered housing are generally much shorter than general needs housing
- They offer a quieter living environment for people of a similar age.

We will sometimes advertise de-designated sheltered accommodation. This will be for people who are aged 55 and over but does not have access to warden assistance.

Extra Care Housing i.e. housing for those who are unable to manage independently and require a higher level of care will not be advertised via Bromley Homeseekers.

Your Bid

Number of bids

You will be able to place up to two bids during each bidding cycle. It is essential that you bid each week in order to increase your chance of moving as quickly as is possible. However, even if you bid each week you may still experience a lengthy wait if you do not use your bids sensibly. Social housing stock is very limited and in some areas very few or no homes become available. If you have very specific preferences regarding the type or location of your home you may find that it is easier to secure a move via the private rented sector or through shared ownership.

Number of bedrooms

You will normally only be able to bid on the size of property that you are eligible for in accordance with the Allocation Scheme. Occasionally though there may be some exceptions to this such as:

- If you require a 4 bedroom home or larger you will normally be able to place a bid on a property that is one bedroom smaller than you are assessed as needing as long as your household does not exceed the number of persons permitted within the home.

Bidding position

Your position on the bid list may alter as the bidding cycle progresses. Bids are held in Band order and within each band, date order. If you place your bid as soon as the bidding cycle begins you may find that your bid position is different once bidding closes. Your bid position will drop if someone with a higher Band or the same Band who has held that Band for a longer time bids on the same property as you.

Withdrawing your bid

When you have placed a bid you will be able to withdraw it whilst the bidding cycle is open in order to move your bid to another property where you may be more successful in securing it.

If we have made a direct offer or if you are registered for automated bidding you will not be able to withdraw the bids made on your behalf.

When Bidding Closes

What happens when bidding closes?

When the bidding cycle closes a shortlist of the top bidders is prepared. Shortlisting can be carried out either by the Housing Solutions team or staff of partner Housing Associations.

What happens if my band is increased after bidding closes?

Once you have placed a bid and the bidding cycle has closed your position on the bidding list cannot be altered i.e. your banding and date on the bid for that property will not alter. If your priority is subsequently increased on the Housing Register only future bids will be affected and your place on previous bid lists will not be altered retrospectively.

Withdrawing a Property

In exceptional circumstances we may have to withdraw a property that has been incorrectly advertised.

The Housing Needs Team also has the right to withdraw a property in an emergency or for an urgent priority household as required.

If a property has been incorrectly advertised it will be withdrawn. This may be either during or after the bidding cycle. At any point, prior to you signing a tenancy, a property can be withdrawn from you if the details advertised were incorrect. We will do this as it is essential that we make best use of all housing stock in order to meet the requirements of those on the housing register.

Bypassing a Bid

Your bid may be bypassed if:

- Your circumstances do not match the “preference given to” criteria outlined in the property advert.
- You have already been successfully shortlisted for another property.
- There are public protection concerns.
- You have already been shortlisted for another property.
- You or a member of your household are involved in anti-social behaviour or have been issued with an ABC.
- You have rent arrears and are not keeping to an agreed payment plan.

In the case of rent arrears we will normally allow you to be shortlisted for a property if:

- You have **less than** 4 weeks worth of arrears, have entered into a payment plan and have kept to it consistently for **3 months**.
- You have **more than** 4 weeks worth of arrears, have entered into a payment plan and have kept to it consistently for **6 months**.

The above are guidelines only and consideration will be given in those instances where there are extenuating circumstances or where an urgent move is required.

Shortlisting

Successful bidders

More than one bidder will normally be selected to meet the Housing Association and view the property. You will be told if you have been selected for a multiple viewing and what you're your listed position is. This will enable you to see how likely you are to secure the property. For example if you are shortlisted as 1st out of 6th you have the best chance of securing the property. If you are shortlisted as 6th out of 6th you will be less likely to secure the property.

Each Housing Association follows different procedures once a property has been shortlisted. Some will invite you to view the property first whilst others may arrange a home visit or request that you attend a meeting at their offices prior to allowing you to view a property.

What happens if your bid is shortlisted?

You will be contacted either by phone, email or in writing and you will be advised what position your bid has been shortlisted in.

You will be notified of the date and time that you are required to meet the Housing Association.

You will be advised of what information you will need to take with you to any meetings or viewings.

If you are shortlisted in position 1 you will not normally be shortlisted for any other properties whilst that bid is being processed. You will be able to continue bidding but your bids will be bypassed.

What happens if your bid isn't shortlisted?

You will not be contacted if your bid is not shortlisted. You will be able to bid during the next bidding cycle as normal.

What happens if the Housing Association rejects your bid?

If a Housing Association rejects your bid they must notify us of their reasons before offering the property to the next shortlisted household. If the reasons they provide are reasonable in accordance with our allocation scheme and nominations agreement they will be allowed to reject your bid. You will be notified of any rejections and the reasons for them.

If we believe that the Housing Association has unfairly or unreasonably rejected your bid we will request that your bid be allowed to proceed.

In the first instance any areas of dispute will attempt to be resolved by the Housing Solutions Team Manager and their counterpart at the Housing Association. If they are unable to resolve the matter it can be escalated to other members of the Housing Needs Team.

Turning Down a Property

What happens if you turn down a property that is offered to you?

We will normally consider that you have turned down a property if:

- You fail to attend a viewing arranged by a Housing Association
- You fail to attend an interview or appointment by a Housing Association

- You fail to provide the information requested by a Housing Association.
- You are offered a property and you decline it.

Limiting the number of properties offered to you:

Through the allocation scheme the numbers of offers made to each applicant is limited to ensure that those on the Housing Register bid sensibly and are able to move within a reasonable period of time.

You are able to turn down up to **two** properties but will then be expected to accept the third property offered to you.

If you fail to accept the third property offered to you we will review your application. At that stage we may either:

- Reduce or remove your priority
- Make you a direct offer

It is not considered to be turning down a property if:

- We bypass your bid
- The Housing Association rejects your bid
- Someone shortlisted above you accepts the property
- The property is withdrawn

Direct offers

We reserve the right to make direct offers as required. Examples of where we may consider that a direct offer is required are where:

- A household has received a priority in accordance with the reasonable preference categories but has either failed to bid, has placed limited bids or has unreasonably turned down accommodation.
- Where a property is identified as meeting the needs of a particular urgent or high priority household.
- In discharge of our duty in accordance with Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
- In order to facilitate a decant programme.

When making a direct offer we will consider employment, education, support and your preferences. However, due to the limited availability of accommodation, it may not be possible to offer you the size, type or location of property that you would prefer. Any direct offer made to you would be of a suitable size in accordance with the allocation scheme. It would not be within a location where it was proven you were at risk.

We will only make **one** formal direct offer of accommodation. If you refuse that offer we will review your application and will normally cancel your application and no further offers will be made to you. You will be able to re-apply to join

the housing register and your application will be assessed and placed in a band that reflects your housing need at the time of the new application. You may not receive the same level of priority and no previous waiting time will be carried over to the new application.

Refusing a direct offer of accommodation:

You have the right to request a review of the direct offer made to you. For further information see the section regarding reviews.

If you refused an offer the property will not be held for you during the review period.

You can sign up for a property and still request that a review be undertaken. Accepting a property whilst submitting a review will not impact on the outcome of the review but will instead ensure that you continue to have a home to occupy.

If the outcome of the review is that the offer made to you was reasonable no further offers will be made to you. Your application will be cancelled. If you are residing in temporary accommodation provided by the Council this will also be cancelled and you will need to make your own housing arrangements.

If the outcome of the review is that the offer made to you was unreasonable then your banding will be re-instated. You will not lose any waiting time. If you have accepted the property offered you will be able to remain there until a more suitable offer is made.

For more information regarding reviews see [XXXX⁵](#)

Publishing Results

Details regarding successful bidders will be advertised on the “**this weeks lettings and results**” section of the Bromley Homeseekers website. The published information will show the Band and the date that it was awarded of the successful bidder. Within your own account you will be able to view this information in conjunction with previous unsuccessful bids you have made. Bidders can use this information to better understand waiting times for certain areas, types and sizes of accommodation and can in turn use that knowledge to influence the bids that they make.

We will periodically advertise more generalised details regarding waiting times.

Reviews and Cancellations

Reviewing and Cancelling Applications

⁵ Hyperlink & reference to reviews procedure to be added

As there is such a severe shortage of housing it is essential that we keep the Housing Register up to date. It is also essential that those that are recognised as having an urgent or high priority actually move within a reasonable timescale in order to alleviate their housing need. As a result we will regularly review the applications of those that are not bidding for accommodation or are bidding and regularly turning down accommodation.

The timescales for reviews will vary based on the circumstances of the household and the type or size of accommodation that they require. We will notify you of the review timescales for your own application.

Following a review if we are satisfied that you have not had the opportunity to secure suitable accommodation we may:

- Extend your bidding time for a further period.
- Discuss your situation with you and look to revise your preferences in order to secure a move.
- Discuss other housing options with you.
- Make a direct offer of accommodation.

If, having reviewed your application, we are satisfied that you have failed to bid on suitable accommodation, have failed to attend a viewing or have unreasonably refused an offer we may:

- Extend your bidding time for a further period.
- Discuss your situation with you and look to revise your preferences in order to secure a move.
- Discuss other housing options with you.
- Make a direct offer of accommodation.
- Reduce your priority on the Housing Register.
- Cancel your application.

Please note that if you are accepted as homeless and in priority need in accordance with Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and we make you a direct offer of accommodation that you subsequently refuse we will consider that we have discharged our duty towards you. Your application will be cancelled and no further offers will be made to you.

Your right to a review

We may make decisions that you disagree with. Before requesting a review you should consider the Allocation Scheme. We clearly outline who is eligible for assistance and why. If your circumstances are not outlined in the Scheme it is unlikely that you will be eligible to join the Housing Register. Unfortunately a large proportion of staff time is spent reviewing the applications of those that have little or no housing need. We understand that you may want to be on the Housing Register but housing resources are scarce and the reason that only those in the most severe housing need are assisted is because there is not enough affordable housing stock to meet everyone's needs.

We would ask that you only request a review of your application if, having considered the Allocation Scheme, you are satisfied that your circumstances have not been correctly assessed.

If this is the case you are able to request a review of the following:

- The assessment of your application.
- The priority you have been awarded.
- The suspension or cancellation of your application.
- The decision to reduce your priority.
- The suitability of any property offered to you.
- The decision to bypass your bid. Please note that this will only be in the instances where your circumstances met any advertised preferences.

Where possible, in your request for a review, you should make reference to the section of the Allocation Scheme that you think is applicable to your circumstances.

Please note that we can only review information that you have already supplied. If your application has been correctly assessed but you failed to supply the requested or appropriate information at the point of application you are not entitled to have your application reviewed. You will instead be asked to submit a new application which gives clear account of your current situation. If you are eligible for inclusion onto the Housing Register by virtue of this new application your priority will begin from that point, i.e the date you supplied all correct information. Your application will not be backdated.

How long will it take for a decision to be made?

From the date that we receive your correspondence we aim to respond to you within 56 working days. If the review is likely to take longer than this we will let you know what the amended response time is.

Who is the review carried out by?

The review will be carried out by a member of staff who was not originally involved in the decision that you have requested a review of. This may not be a member of the Management Team but will be a senior member of staff.

The decision of the reviewing officer will be final and you will not be entitled to a further review of their decision.

Who to write to for a review

Please ensure that you entitle your correspondence **Review Request**.

You can send a review request via email to:

bromleyhomeseekers@bromley.gov.uk

Or via post to:

The Housing Solutions Team
Bromley Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley
BR1 3UH

Complaints, Compliments and Comments

We appreciate your feedback and would welcome any comments you have about how we can improve or add to the service that we offer. This includes the Bromley Homeseekers website, the literature we produce and us as staff.

We also want you to tell us what we're doing well so that we can keep doing it.

Alternatively, we appreciate that we don't always get it right and there may be times when you want to complain about the service you have received.

Please bear in mind any complaint regarding

- The assessment of your application.
- The priority you have been awarded.
- The suspension or cancellation of your application.
- The decision to reduce your priority.
- The suitability of any property offered to you.
- The decision to bypass your bid.

Will be regarded as a review and not a complaint and will be treated in accordance with the review guidelines.

Who will respond to a complaint?

Your complaint will usually be investigated by a senior officer or the manager responsible for providing the service you have complained about.

How long will it take to receive a response?

From the date that we receive your correspondence we aim to respond to you within 20 working days. If a response is likely to take longer than this we will let you know what the amended response time is.

Who to write to with a Comment, Compliment or Complaint

Please ensure that you entitle your correspondence either **Comment**, **Compliment** or **Complaint**.

This can be sent either via email to: socialcarecomplaints@bromley.gov.uk

Or via post to: The Complaints, Compliments and Comments Manager
Bromley Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley
BR1 3UH

Or by phone on: 0208 464 3333

If you are still unhappy with how your complaint has been dealt with you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman via post at:

The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

By phone on: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983

Via email to: advice@lgo.org.uk

You can also text 'call back' to 0762 480 4299.

Service Standards

When you visit us

- If you have a scheduled appointment the person you have come to see will meet you within 10 minutes of your appointment time.
- If you don't have a scheduled appointment we will do our best to help you. This may be over the phone at one of our receptions or we may need to arrange an appointment for you at a later date.

When we visit you

- We will arrive on time and will call you if we are running late.
- We will show you our ID card when we arrive.

When you phone us

- we aim to answer calls courteously within 3 rings
- we will always try to answer your query straight away if we can
- if we don't know the answer to your question we will find out the answer and get back to you within one working day

When you email or write to us to update your application or with a general query

- We aim to respond with a full answer as soon as possible, but ideally within 5 working days of receiving your letter
- If we can't respond in full within 5 days, we will let you know we have received your letter and try to follow up with an answer within the next 5 working days
- Whatever happens, we will keep you informed
- We will write in a clear, concise and easy to understand way.
- We will make sure that our departmental e-mail boxes are checked at least once a day during working hours.

When you email or write to us in order to complain or request a review

- We aim to respond with a full answer as soon as possible, but ideally within 56 working days of receiving your review letter and 20 days of receiving your complaint letter.
- If we can't respond in full within these timescales, we will let you know we have received your letter and try to follow up with an answer within the next 5 working days
- Whatever happens, we will keep you informed
- We will write in a clear, concise and easy to understand way.

Glossary

Word	Definition
Alleviate	To make something bad such as pain or problems less severe
Advocate (cy)	To publicly support or suggest an idea, development or way of doing something
ABC	Acceptable behaviour contract: given to someone if the police or local authority has evidence that their behaviour is damaging their community. It can be given to anyone, no matter how old they are.
Bid	This means that you can express your interest in the vacant properties advertised on the Bromley Homeseekers website. It does not mean that you have to use your own money to participate in the scheme.
Bidding Cycle	When properties are available to be bid on.
Decant Programme (Decanting)	If major works are required to a Housing Association property, and it is decided that it is not safe for you to stay whilst they are carried out, the local authority may ask you to move to alternative accommodation. This is called “decanting”.
Direct offer	An offer of accommodation where the property has been selected by the local authority (bypassing the bidding process).
Cohesion	When the members of a group or society are united

Community stability	The capacity of a community (incorporated town or county) to absorb and cope with change without major hardship to institutions or groups within the community.
Facilitate	To make possible or easier
Housing Needs Team	Those included within the Housing Needs Team are the Housing Team Managers, Housing Group Managers, the Head of Housing Needs and the Assistant Director for Housing and Residential Services.
Housing Stock	This means dwellings such as houses, flats, maisonettes, bungalows and bedsits. It does not refer to caravans, mobile homes or plots of land.
Irresolvable category 1 hazard	Each hazard is assessed separately, and if judged to be 'serious', with a 'high score', is deemed to be a Category 1 hazard.
Liaison	Communication between people or groups who work with each other
Misconception	An idea which is wrong because it has been based on a failure to understand a situation
Ombudsman	Someone who works for a government or large organization and deals with the complaints made against it
Partnership working	Partnership working is working together across organisations. It brings different skills and resources together to deal with a common problem. It is a long term approach and requires flexibility and openness
Prognosis	A statement of what is judged likely to happen in the future, especially in connection with a particular situation
Prohibition notice	An enforcement notice which is used to help authorities deal with serious risks, secure compliance with health and safety law and prevent harm.
Reciprocal (agreement)	A reciprocal action or arrangement involves two people or groups of people who behave in the same way or agree to help each other and give each other advantages.

Recourse	Using something or someone as a way of getting help, especially in a difficult or dangerous situation.
Retrospective	Looking back on or dealing with past events or situations.
Sustainable communities	Communities planned, built, or modified to promote sustainable living. They tend to focus on environmental sustainability (including development and agriculture) and economic sustainability.