



Hart District Council

Housing Services

Changes to Hart's Allocations Policy

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Date Reviewed: July 2014

www.hart.gov.uk

Background:

The Council has reviewed its approach to housing allocations following the introduction of the allocations sections of the Localism Act 2011. These sections came in to force in June 2012.

The introduction of these sections was accompanied by statutory guidance. This guidance has encouraged local authorities in England to consider a number of factors when allocating housing. These include:

- Making use of new freedoms to better manage the waiting list.
- Tailoring allocations priorities to meet local needs and local circumstances.
- Considering local qualification criteria for applicants, to include local connection and financial capability.
- Promoting mobility for existing social housing tenants.
- Removing local connection restrictions from applications made by members and former members of the armed services.

Hart's new allocations policy has been developed with regard to this guidance. It has also been influenced by feedback from consultation carried out with stakeholders and existing Housing Register applicants in order to best reflect the housing needs of local people, and to achieve the right balance of priorities within the allocations scheme.

What will be the main changes to Hart's Allocations Policy?

Listed below are the main changes which will be introduced with the new policy, including details of how the new criteria may affect existing and new applicants.

Qualifying criteria

Hart will be introducing new qualifying criteria. People who do not meet the new qualifying criteria will no longer be able to join the Housing Register.

All applicants will still be able to receive housing advice and assistance from the Council, regardless of whether or not they qualify to join.

The new qualifying criteria are explained over the next few pages.

Unacceptable behaviour

- Applicants guilty of unacceptable behaviour will no longer qualify to join the housing register.
- Applicants who have provided false and/or misleading information to the Council to gain advantage for housing will no longer qualify to join the housing register.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

New and existing applicants who are assessed as being guilty of unacceptable behaviour will not qualify to be registered for housing for 12 months, and will only be considered after this time once evidence has been provided which confirms a change in their pattern of behaviour.

Similarly, applicants who are assessed as having provided false and/or misleading information to the Council will not qualify to be registered to apply for housing for a period of 12 months.

Local connection

Applicants who do not meet one or more of the local connection criteria set out below will no longer qualify to join the housing register.

- Applicant has been resident within Hart for a minimum of 6 out of the last 12 months, or for 3 out of the last 5 years.
- Applicant employed and actually working within the Hart district.
- Applicant has a close family member (parent, sibling or adult child) who currently resides within Hart and have done so for 5+ years.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

Applicants who do not have a local connection will no longer qualify to join the Housing Register. Where this criterion applies to existing applicants, their application will be closed.

However, the following groups will be exempt from the local connection qualifying criteria.

- Armed Forces personnel and the wider forces community, in line with the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Housing association tenants residing outside of Hart where Hart has nomination rights to their property.
- Single people and couples aged 55+ who are applying for older persons' accommodation.
- Applicants placed by Hart Council into supported accommodation outside of the district, but where Hart will receive rights to that vacancy.
- Applicants placed outside the district by Hart Council through a Private Rented Sector Offer.
- Other exceptional circumstances – such as people fleeing violence or harassment from areas where they have a strong local connection.

Financial assessment

Under the new policy, where an applicant meets one of the following criteria set out below, a Housing Cost Assessment will be undertaken to establish if they qualify to join the Housing Register.

- Applicant has a total household income exceeding £60,000 per annum.
- Applicant has total household savings or assets exceeding £16,000.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

Applicants who meet one of the criteria set out above will undergo a Housing Cost Assessment.

This assessment will determine whether the applicant is eligible to apply for housing based on their assessed housing affordability, and will consider factors including the applicant's income, outgoings and the average rent costs locally.

However the following groups will be exempt from the financial assessment qualifying criteria:

- Where an applicant has a lump sum received from the Armed Forces as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service.
- Single people and couples aged 55+ who are applying for older persons' accommodation.

Assessment of housing need

Applicants who are assessed not to have a 'housing need' (i.e. medical need, overcrowding, disrepair, insanitary housing etc), will no longer qualify to join the Housing Register under the new policy.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

Applicants who are assessed as having no 'housing need' will no longer qualify to join the Housing Register. Where this criterion applies to existing applicants, their application will be closed.

However, the following groups will be exempt from the housing need qualifying criteria.

- Applicants who are existing tenants of a housing association where Hart Council have nomination rights to their property.
- Single people and couples aged 55+ who are applying for older persons' accommodation.
- Applicants residing within the private rented sector.
- Applicants serving in the regular Armed Forces or have served in the Regular Armed Forces within 5 years of the date of their application.

Applicants who are exempt from the housing need qualifying criteria will be eligible to join the Housing Register. They may, however, be awarded lower priority depending on their circumstances.

Please see the 'Changes in Banding' section on pages 10 and 11 for further information.

Changes to the Hart Bedroom Standard

Hart's Bedroom Standard will be changed under the new policy, and will be brought into alignment with the current Housing Benefit (Local Housing Allowance) criteria.

Household Type	Studio Flat	1	2	3	4	5
Single person						
Couple						
Pregnant woman with or without partner, and no other children						
Parent(s) with one child						
Parent(s) with two same sex children where both children are under 16 years old						
Parent(s) with one girl and one boy both under 10						
Parent(s) with one girl and one boy where one child is over 10						
Parent(s) with two same sex children where one child is over 16 years old						
Parent(s) with three children regardless of age or sex						
Parent(s) with four or more children						

Hart's new bedroom standard

There will be the following changes under the new bedroom standard.

- Age at which different sex children can share a bedroom will rise from 7 years to 10 years.
- Unborn children will only be considered on an application once the child has been born.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

All applications will be reviewed in line with the new bedroom standard which may result in an applicant's registered bedroom size being changed.

This is likely to affect applicants who have two different sex children where the eldest child is aged 7 years or over. The registered bedroom size for these applicants will fall from 3 bedroom need to 2 bedroom need.

Under the new policy, applicants who are expecting a baby will no longer have their bedroom size reviewed until the child has actually been born.

Shared care of children

The way in which applicants are assessed who provide shared care to a child or children will change.

Under the new policy, in order for a child or children to be included as part of an applicant's household, proof that Applicant 1 or Applicant 2 are in receipt of Child Benefit for that child or children will be required.

Only in very exceptional circumstances will the Council consider awarding additional bedroom space outside of these criteria.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

Applicants who provide shared care to a child or children, but who are not able to meet the criteria explained above, will not be registered for extra bedroom space to accommodate that child or children.

Moving from shared-ownership accommodation

The criteria for awarding priority to applicants residing in shared-ownership accommodation will change under the new policy, with the possibility of higher priority being allocated.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

Applicants residing in shared-ownership accommodation who need to move due to affordability or health reasons, but who are not financially able to achieve a move will be given higher preference through the banding scheme.

Review of applications awarded additional priority

A regular review will be carried out of all applications awarded additional priority (Band A or Band B) due to an urgent need to move.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

Reviews will be carried out to determine whether the priority awarded to an application is still appropriate. Where an applicant who has been awarded additional priority does not bid for suitable properties advertised through the housing register, the additional priority may be removed.

Better use of temporary accommodation

The new allocations policy will allow automatic bidding for applicants residing in temporary accommodation who fail to explore move on options after a 3 month period.

How will this affect applicants registered for housing?

Applicants residing in temporary accommodation provided by Hart Council will be expected to explore realistic options to move on to more settled accommodation.

Where an applicant fails to do so, automatic bidding will commence 3 months after the tenancy start date/date of homelessness application. If an applicant is offered a property as a result of an automatic bid, they will be expected to accept the offer. The Council may end any homelessness duty is has to households in temporary accommodation who refuse suitable offers of accommodation that are made through this automatic bidding process.

Changes in banding criteria

The new allocations policy will move from the existing five band scheme (Band A to Band E) to a four band scheme (Band A to Band D) which is shown below.

Band A	Reasonable Preference (housing need) cases with an urgent housing requirement that needs rectifying as soon as possible.
	Emergency Medical and/or disability because current accommodation is wholly inappropriate to occupy
	Exceptional circumstances on welfare grounds with supporting evidence
	Severe Environmental Health grounds that cannot be rectified within 12 months
	Emergency Strategic Lettings. For example: <i>Decants, Management Transfer, Successions with notice served, Transfer applicants with 2 spare rooms or more and the Council has the nomination rights to the resulting vacancy, To release an adapted property (subject to certain qualifications and the Council has the nomination rights to the resulting vacancy)</i>
Band B	Reasonable Preference (housing need) cases with a high priority and a housing requirement that needs rectifying within a 12 month period
	Urgent need to move on medical or disability grounds
	Urgent need to move on welfare grounds
	Priority overcrowding (<i>assessed as being statutorily overcrowded and the accommodation was originally suitable for the applicant household needs at the start of the tenancy</i>).
	Priority prevention of homelessness cases (<i>Former tenants that voluntarily gave up their tenancy for special reasons by agreement, and are now ready to be re-housed</i>)
	High Priority Strategic Lettings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Move on from supported housing where HDC has the resulting vacancy</i> • <i>Agricultural Dwelling-House Advisory Committee (ADHAC) cases</i> • <i>Transfer applicant under-occupying by one or more bedrooms where HDC has nomination rights to resulting vacancy</i> • <i>Separated households (two existing social housing tenants wishing to become one household where neither property is suitable for the household to live in</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Special reciprocal arrangements with other Councils/housing associations</i> • <i>Shared ownership applicants living in Hart who need to move due to financial or medical reasons but do not have the financial capacity to do so</i>
	Fostering & Adoption (<i>applicants who have been assessed as meeting the requirements of the Joint Fostering and Adoption Protocol</i>)
Band C	Reasonable Preference (housing need) cases
	A link between an applicant's health and housing has been established however no confirmation provided that an urgent move is required
	Homeless households (in line with Hart's full criteria)
	Overcrowding – lacking bedroom(s) in accordance with the Hart Bedroom Standard but not statutory overcrowding
	People leaving care - Hampshire County Council Care Leaver who has been assessed as ready for move on into independent accommodation
	Unsatisfactory or insanitary housing conditions (<i>lack of facilities, sharing with household members NOT included within their application</i>)
	Applicants assessed as suitable for sheltered/extra care housing
	Applicants ready to move on from hostels or similar accommodation and/or applicants in Supported Housing
	Applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship
	Other Strategic lettings – where reasonable preference does not apply but we wish to give extra priority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Applicants in private rented or tied accommodation</i> • <i>Transfer applicants in existing social housing with no reasonable preference but the resulting vacancy would be given back to HDC</i> • <i>Home owners and shared ownership applicants who have a need to move into larger accommodation but do not have the financial capacity to do so in accordance with the financial criteria</i>
Band D	Reasonable Preference (housing need) cases with a reduced priority
	Applicants that are not engaging with Housing Options or other relevant services
	Social housing tenants from outside the district where Hart District Council has no nomination rights to the property
	Applicants who are serving in the regular forces or who have served in the regular forces within five years of the date of their application, and have been registered without Reasonable Preference'
	Applicants who have lost their previous accommodation due to a deliberate act or omission on their part but are not excluded by the qualifying criteria
	Applicants who have deliberately worsened their circumstances within the last 2 years to gain advantage on the Housing Register
	Transfer applicants in existing social housing with no reasonable preference where the resulting vacancy would be given back to HDC
	Single or couple 55+ registered as a result of a qualifying criteria exemption

How and when will Hart's new allocations policy be introduced?

July 2014

All applicants registered for housing with Hart District Council are sent a letter and leaflet advising of the upcoming changes to the allocations policy.

September 2014

A further letter will be sent to all housing register applicants asking that they re-register if they are wishing to remain registered to apply for housing.

October 2014

Hart's Choice Based Lettings Scheme will close down for three weeks (which will include three bidding cycles) to allow applicants to be re-registered onto the system. Applications will be re-assessed at this time in line with the new policy, and applicants advised by letter of their new registered Band and bedroom size.

No properties will be advertised for let during this time.

End of October 2014

Hart's new allocations policy will come into effect on 27th October with the first bidding cycle going live under the new policy between 30th October – 2nd November.

If you have any queries regarding the new allocations policy, or you require assistance to re-register your application please contact Hart's Housing Team.

Tel: 01252 774420

Email: housing.services@hart.gov.uk

Web: www.hart.gov.uk