

Changes to Allocations Scheme - Consultation

Overview

All Local Authorities are legally required to have an Allocations Scheme which sets out how we prioritise applicants for social housing, and how social housing is allocated via our Choice Based Lettings system known as Homechoice at Reading. You can see Reading Borough Council's current scheme at <https://www.reading.gov.uk/housing/find-a-home/homechoice/>

At Reading Borough Council, we are reviewing our housing Allocations Scheme. Our aims are to make the scheme fairer and easier to understand for the customers who use it, and to ensure we are creating thriving and well-balanced communities where residents want to live.

We have defined these two themes as:

- Well-Balanced Sustainable Communities
- Clear and Fair Allocations Scheme

Well Balanced Sustainable Communities

We want our communities to be places that people want to live for generations to come. We believe that a well-balanced and thriving community is created when residents are happy in the areas where they live, and that residents feel more invested in their community when they are in areas where they can access the services, and support, and opportunities that benefit them. We believe that well balanced communities with good opportunities for all residents have lower levels of anti-social behaviour.

There are 3 changes that we believe we can make to create well balanced, thriving communities. We are asking you how effective you think these changes will be. These changes are:

- Award some priority to existing tenants who wish to move to give them an opportunity to move to communities they can invest in. Increase priority awarded to tenants who are severely overcrowded in our properties.
 - Currently priority is only awarded to tenants if there is a recognised need to move, as defined by the Allocations Scheme
 - We would like to give some priority to existing tenants, regardless of need, so that they have a better opportunity to move
 - We would also like to award more priority to households who are severely overcrowded
- Provide more opportunities for essential workers, such as social workers, teachers, nurses, health and care workers, police and fire officers (key workers) to access affordable housing.
 - Currently key workers need to have lived in the borough or worked here for 3 years before they can access Homechoice at Reading for affordable homes. Removing this criteria will support recruitment of essential workers in the borough.
 - We would like to introduce a "quota" of properties, a set amount of properties each year which are let to this group. We would also offer fixed-term tenancies for specifically identified key worker housing schemes thereby making the accommodation available for other key workers if a tenant's work situation changes. Key workers in these identified schemes will be assisted to take advantage of other initiatives such as shared ownership at the end of the fixed term.

APPENDIX 1

- Take stronger actions against those who are evicted from our communities for anti-social behaviour
 - Currently those who are evicted as a result of anti-social behaviour cannot join Homechoice at Reading for 3 years from the date of their eviction, and in some situations, we have found that after 3 years some residents are still not suitable to become a tenant due to their ongoing behaviour.
 - We would like to firstly assess every individuals' behaviours, giving ourselves the option to increase the time to 5-10 years for those who continue to behaviour poorly.

Clear and Fair Allocations Scheme

We know that social housing is a very important resource to our communities and that it is vital the allocation of that housing is fair, and that customers can easily understand the process. The current Allocations Scheme sets out how we prioritise households for social housing and how social housing is allocated. We have identified 2 changes that we believe would make the scheme all the more transparent:

- Reducing the number of priority bands
 - Currently we have 6 bands of priority, from Band A, being the most urgent need to move, to NPFH (No Priority for Housing), which is those who do not have any recognised need to move, as defined in the scheme.
 - We would like to reduce the number of bands to simplify this for applicants, but also staff.
- Separate register for those who require adaptations and for adapted homes
 - Currently those who require significant adaptations in their home, such as a through floor lift, wheelchair adaptations, etc, are currently registered on Homechoice at Reading along with all other applicants. Likewise, accommodation that is already adapted or would lend themselves to such significant adaptations are advertised along with all other properties. This can mean that people who require adaptations are unsure on what they should be placing bids for or are unclear if the property would be suitable to meet their needs. Assessments are carried out on every individual situation, which is both time consuming for Officers, but also frustrating for those who need to move.
 - We would like to put in place a separate register for those who require adaptations, but also for those properties that are already adapted or would lend themselves to significant adaptations to only be made available to those on this separate register.

Why are we consulting

It is important for Reading Borough Council to deliver a fair and effective service for our residents and that your opinion on those changes are taken into account. It is also a legal requirement to consult with our residents, and partner agencies, on major changes to our Allocations Scheme.

What happens next

The consultation will be open for responses for an 8-week period, closing on the 10th May 2021. Once the consultation closes, we will collate the responses together in a report which will be submitted to a Committee for approval, along with a draft of the new Allocations Scheme, taking into account the detail of the responses received.

Consultation

Well Balanced Sustainable Communities

Proposed Change	Do you agree with these changes?		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Award some priority to existing RBC tenants who wish to move regardless of need			
Award further priority to severely overcrowded tenants			
Remove the residency criteria for key workers			
Prioritise key workers by providing a "quota" of properties each year for this group			
Assess each individual's behaviour on a case by case basis instead of a set period for everyone			
Increase the sanction for those who have been previously evicted for anti-social behaviour to 5-10 years			
Please detail here any alternatives that you think would help us to achieve this aim			
Please provide any comments on these proposed changes			

Clear and Fair Allocations Scheme

Proposed Change	Do you agree with these changes?		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Reduce the number of priority bands			
Put in place a separate register for those who require significant adaptations			
Make adapted or adaptable properties only available to those that need them			
Please detail here any alternatives that you think would help us to achieve this aim			
Please provide any comments on these proposed changes			