

# Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee

10 March 2026



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

<b>Title</b>	Allocations Scheme Update
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a key decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report</b>	Melissa Wise – Executive Director Communities and Adult Social Care
<b>Report author</b>	Sarah Hennessy – Interim Housing Needs Manager
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr Matt Yeo
<b>Council priority</b>	Promote more equal communities in Reading
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. That the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee approve the proposed amendments to the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme, and that the revised scheme be adopted and implemented in April 2026.

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out proposed updates to Reading Borough Council’s Allocations Scheme in response to updated Social Housing Allocations Guidance and Improving Access to Social Housing for Victims of Domestic Abuse Guidance, both published in July 2025 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG). The proposed changes address specific requirements relating to Armed Forces personnel, survivors of Domestic Abuse and Care Leavers albeit they do not alter the Council’s overall approach to administering lettings.
- 1.2. Further minor amendments are also proposed to clarify wording in the Scheme ensuring it clearly lays out the Councils’ responsibilities.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1. In response to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, all local authorities are required to publish an Allocations Scheme setting out how Social Housing is allocated. Reading Borough Council’s most recent Scheme was published in 2024 following consultation and a full review based on the most up to date guidance at the time and included a change in the way in which applications were prioritised.
- 2.2. Periodically, new Social Housing Allocations Guidance is published by Government setting out changes to the way in which local authorities are expected to carry out their functions. While most frequently updates to guidance relate to the eligibility criteria, the guidance issued in July 2025 requested amendments to other areas of the Scheme.
- 2.3. Additionally, improved monitoring of complaints and resident feedback, coupled with a recent legal challenge, has highlighted the need to clarify certain wording in the Scheme which could be open to misinterpretation or challenge.

## 3. The Proposal

- 3.1. This section provides an overview of the recommended amendments in line with the guidance published in July 2025, and amendments to wording that have been identified since the Scheme was published in 2024. Appendix 1 provides the detail of the recommended amendments, with the full Scheme with tracked changes captured in Appendix 2.
- 3.2. Amendments as a result of the July 2025 guidance.
- 3.3. *Armed Forces:*
  - 3.3.1. Local authorities have been asked to expand on their definition for those who are an exception to any residency criteria to include bereaved or civil partners of service personnel, who are required to leave their MOD accommodation following the death of their spouse. For former or existing members of the regular armed forces, it also removes the 5 years from discharge rule and now covers any period of time from discharge.
  - 3.3.2. Priority awarded to armed forces personnel has also been amended with the removal of the 5 years from discharge rule.
- 3.4. *Care Leavers:*
  - 3.4.1. Previously the exception to the residency criteria allowed for young people placed outside of the borough by RBC, and where RBC retained a duty to the young person, they would retain their local connection. Local connection is assessed based on accommodation of choice, and a placement into accommodation by a local authority is not considered accommodation of choice for the applicant. The guidance has asked local authorities to include those care leavers who have been placed in the borough by other local authorities to recognise links to the community, including support, education and employment, that they have built while residing in the borough, and to include the definition of a care leaver.
  - 3.4.2. The impact to the Council is low, with fewer than 5 currently registered in these circumstances.
- 3.5. *Domestic Abuse:*
  - 3.5.1. There are 2 amendments on this matter. Firstly, the current Scheme provides an exception to the residency criteria for those who have fled an abusive relationship and are residing in Safe Accommodation in Reading. The guidance has asked local authorities to expand on these criteria to include any person who has fled an abusive relationship and who needs to move to an area of their choosing for safety reasons, to promote mobility and break down barriers faced by this cohort when trying to relocate and to include the definition of domestic abuse.
  - 3.5.2. Secondly, the new guidance has also set out that, those fleeing an abusive relationship who have a secure tenancy in social housing in a different area, should not be subject to an introductory period in another local authority area, and therefore should retain their security of tenure.
  - 3.5.3. The impact to the Council in relation to these amendments is low. Since 2024, there have been two new applications from out of area to the Housing Register as a result of domestic abuse. Since July 2025, when the guidance was published, we have seen no new applications that would have benefited from either change which, positively, is likely to be due to protections put in place by social housing providers more generally to protect their social housing tenants, with options such as Management Transfers being utilised instead.
- 3.6. Amendments required to clarify the Scheme.
- 3.7. Updating the Scheme in response to the new guidance has also provided opportunity to clarify wording which has been identified through resident feedback as requiring updates.

The way in which the Scheme is interpreted will not change in relation to assessments; however, this is an opportunity to make the Scheme more accessible and transparent.

### 3.8. *Overcrowding:*

3.8.1. The Allocations Scheme has previously referenced the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to assess overcrowding, which is incorrect as the HHSRS is primarily an enforcement tool to address poor housing conditions, rather than a measure of suitability of accommodation resulting from overcrowding. The Scheme should instead refer to the Housing Act 1985 assessment for statutory overcrowding which is the assessment used in practice.

3.8.2. This is a minor change and of all the applications currently on the Housing Register only one application has actually been assessed using the HHSRS.

### 3.9. *Homelessness:*

3.9.1. Prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017) the Council's only statutory homeless duty was the main housing duty (the full homeless duty) for which the Allocations Scheme awarded priority. The HRA 2017 introduced two new statutory duties to the homeless legislation, the prevention and relief duties, which were not reflected in the Scheme at the time. Updating the Scheme is necessary to clearly set out how we award priority to those approaching as homeless, and how relevant priority is awarded for each statutory duty. Priority is awarded to those in a prevention or relief duty, with additional priority being awarded where the main housing duty is owed.

3.9.2. This change will not impact any applications as it is clarification of the wording in the scheme.

### 3.10. *Ineligible Household Members:*

3.10.1. Challenges have been received in relation to when non-eligible members of the household, those household members who do not have recourse to public funds in the UK, are included in assessments for priority and the size of accommodation required. Non-eligible members of the household are legally required to be excluded from the tenancy agreement if housed. Wording has been updated so that the legal position is clearer for applicants.

3.10.2. This is a minor change and of all of the applications currently on the Housing Register only one application is impacted.

## **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

4.1 The Council Plan has established five priorities for the years 2025/28. The Housing Allocations Scheme supports the following priorities by letting homes in a transparent way:

- Promote more equal communities in Reading
- Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint
- Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children

4.2 In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:

- Putting residents first
- Building on strong foundations
- Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities
- Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents
- Being proudly ambitious for Reading

4.3 The amendments to the Allocations Scheme will provide a better response to vulnerable cohorts within, and outside of Reading, and will provide more transparent information for residents, helping to support the Directorate's common purpose of 'Supporting the Life that Matters to You'.

## **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. In line with the guidance on environmental and climate implications there are no identified implications.

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Consultation is required when major changes are being proposed. However, the amendments set out in this report do not constitute a major change and therefore a full public consultation is not required.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. There are no proposed changes that alter the Council's overall approach to Letting properties. Therefore, there are no negative equality impacts as a result of the recommended changes in response to the July 2025 guidance. In relation to amendments proposed as a result of feedback, the amendments seek to provide further clarity: no change to how the Scheme is delivered will occur.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. There are no other relevant considerations.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1.1 Local Authorities must administer the allocation of social housing in line with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. Local housing authorities are required to have regard to the government guidance entitled 'Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local housing authorities in England' (which was published in 2012 and most recently updated in July 2025) in exercising their functions under Part VI. Failure to follow statutory provision may lead to legal challenge including a judicial review challenge against the Council or a referral to the Local Government Ombudsman.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. There are no known financial implications as a result of the recommended amendments.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. The timetable for implementation is as follows:

- Approval at HNL Committee 10 March 2026
- Publication of new scheme 1 April 2026

## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1. There are none.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Housing Allocation Scheme – Proposed Amendments**
- Appendix 2: Full Allocations Scheme with tracked changes**