

New Build Properties Local Lettings Plan

Introduction

The City of Wolverhampton Council's Allocation Policy satisfies the requirement on the Council by Part VI Section 167 of the Housing Act 1996 to have a scheme for determining priorities, and the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation both to first time applicants and transferring tenants.

The aim of the Allocations Policy, whilst meeting legislative requirements, is to make best use of the limited supply of social and affordable housing becoming vacant each year by providing a simple, transparent priority system based on clear criteria which determines an applicant's place within the allocations scheme.

The policy recognises that from time to time certain housing stock would benefit from a local lettings plan where the needs are not met by way of the main Allocations Policy.

Location

The Council is set to build or acquire over 500 new affordable rent council properties by 2024. These properties will be located throughout the city and will be managed by Wolverhampton Homes and the City's Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) dependent on their location.

Objective

A plan for the letting of new build council housing has been agreed to:

- ensure the stability and sustainability of new communities created through large scale new build and regeneration by giving some priority to transferring tenants who have demonstrated they are able to sustain a tenancy;
- ensure existing communities remain balanced and sustainable and are not destabilised by the letting of concentrations of new build within an area, by giving some priority to those with a local connection to the area;
- maximise the number of new lettings by giving some priority to transferring tenants, which will help to alleviate a greater quantum of housing need through chain lettings;
- make best use of stock by only letting new build to those in housing need;
- ensure that households that require property types that are in the most short supply in the city are not disadvantaged by the policy, by excluding bungalows and four plus bedroom units;
- ensure there is opportunity for those households on the housing register who are in greatest housing need to access new build homes.;
- ensure those groups protected by an equality characteristic are not disadvantaged by this plan.

Scope

This plan relates to new build properties, built or acquired by the Council for council housing, with some exclusions including bungalows, four bedroom plus properties and any supported housing.

This plan is also applicable to any new build properties owned by Housing Associations with whom the Council has a nomination agreement.

This plan relates to the first let of properties only. Relets will be let in full accordance with the Council's main Allocations Policy.

This plan does not apply to some current development sites due to previous commitments, these sites will have individual local letting plans.

Letting Plan Criteria

Applicants must be eligible for the specific property type to be considered for it. Eligibility criteria and household categories are set out in the Council's Allocation Policy.

1. Eligible Properties

All housing types are eligible for letting under this plan **excluding** bungalows, four bedroom plus properties, ground floor flats and specialist/supported housing, which will be allocated in full accordance with the Council's Allocation Policy, as these property types are in short supply and should be allocated to those households with the greatest need for them.

2. Emergency Band

10% of all properties will be prioritised for applicants in the Emergency Band, to ensure those households on the housing register in greatest housing need have the opportunity to be housed when new build properties become available to let.

3. Transfer List Applicants

Priority will be given to existing Council tenants registered on the transfer list for the remaining 90% of properties.

The purpose of prioritising existing tenants is to:

- create/maintain sustainable and stable mixed communities, with housing being let to existing tenants in housing need who are eligible for a move and so are able to demonstrate they can manage and sustain a tenancy;
- maximise the opportunity of meeting housing need offered by new build properties as through chain lettings, rehousing existing tenants will increase the number of properties becoming available to other applicants on the housing register, meaning multiple households will benefit from each new property.

All new build properties allocated to existing tenants will be done in accordance with the Allocations policy's banding system, however, applicants in Band 4 will not be eligible to ensure those existing tenants securing a transfer are in housing need.

4. Local Connection

For 50% of properties where priority is given to existing tenants, additional priority will be given to existing tenants with an agreed local connection to the area of the development, in accordance with the local connection criteria set out in the Allocations policy.

In order to establish local connection, the applicant must be able to demonstrate at least one of the following criteria in addition to any housing need criteria:

- a. Giving or receiving essential support which is evidenced by professional support e.g. hospital, social services etc. Can also be confirmed by the Council's medical advisor.
- b. Needs to be close to family/child minder for help with child care etc. which is necessary for the applicant to find/remain in work and travelling from one part of the City to leave children at childcare and then travelling on to work/education has cost, time, disruption implications etc. Difficulties must be able to be evidenced.
- c. Long term residency - 5 years out of the previous 10.
- d. Working in the area where the job includes early starts/late finishes.
- e. Children in school in the area.
- f. Cultural reasons e.g. to be near place of worship, community facilities etc.

The local connection priority will only apply to developments with over 5 council rented units and will be capped at 20 properties for any new build developments with more than 40 council rented units.

The purpose of prioritising existing tenants is to:

- maintain sustainable communities, with housing being let to existing tenants in housing need who are local to the area, bringing stability to concentrations of new tenancies in an area;
- provide opportunity to those in housing need to move within their local area, helping to maintain support networks that may be in place.

All new build properties allocated to applicants with a local connection will be done so in accordance with the Allocations policy's banding system, however, applicants in Band 4 will not be eligible.

5. Failure to let

In the unlikely event of new build properties not being let after the initial round of bidding, all remaining properties will be allocated in full accordance with the Allocations policy.

How the Local Letting Plan will be applied

The allocation of properties through this local lettings plan will be done in close accordance with the Council's Allocation's Policy:

- Applicants will need to have a live housing application on Homes in the City;
 - Properties being let under this local lettings plan will be advertised on Homes in the City. Adverts will be clearly marked as giving priority as set out in the lettings plan criteria.
 - Eligible applicants will need to bid on properties within the advertised bidding period.
 - When the bidding period comes to an end, contact will be made with the applicant who:
 - a. Is in the highest priority band;
 - b. Has the greatest number of housing needs that placed them in that band;
 - c. Has had that level of housing need the longest;
 - d. and is eligible for that property.
- The applicant will be contacted to request that they supply evidence of their housing circumstances, their identity and the identity of those moving with them. If the applicant fails to provide this evidence within a reasonable amount of time the applicant will be by passed and contact will be made with the next applicant on the shortlist.
- Finally, if a successful applicant still cannot be found the home will be let in accordance with the Allocations Policy, removing the local lettings plan priority.

Ending the Local Lettings Plan

Following the first let of new build properties the local lettings plan will no longer be applicable to all future reletting of these properties, which will be undertaken in full accordance with the Council's Allocation Policy.

Equalities Analysis

An equalities analysis has been undertaken as part of the development of the plan and has found:

- Excluding bungalows and ground floor flats from the LLP ensures these properties are let to applicants with the highest level of need, which are often applicants with a disability.
- Excluding four bedroom plus properties from the LLP ensures these properties are allocated to those with the highest level of need to alleviate some of the overcrowding issues in the City, which is more prevalent in BAME communities.

Monitoring of the Local Lettings Plan

Once all new build properties on a development have been let the Council will complete an evaluation exercise to review how all properties were let, assessing factors of housing need, household composition, equalities and if the original objectives of the local lettings plan have been achieved.

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