

# **Tees Valley Lettings Partnership**



# **Common Allocation Policy**

**Updated: Version 1  
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## **Glossary of Terms**

### **Adapted Properties**

Homes which have been designed or adapted to meet the needs of people with physical or sensory disabilities e.g. level access shower, wet room, widened doorways or changes to access to the property.

### **Advocate**

Someone who an applicant has given permission to act on their behalf to deal with their application, e.g. support worker, family member.

### **Applicant**

A person who applies to for housing on the lettings scheme.

### **Band**

The system used for giving priority for housing.

### **Common Allocation Policy**

A single set of rules covering the way we give priority for housing, shared by all the partner organisations.

### **Interpreter**

A person or organisation who can provide a translation service for non-English speaking customers or a sign language service for the hearing impaired.

### **Local Connection**

Connections to a local authority area because of residency, employment, close family or a main source of support.

### **Nomination Agreement**

This agreement details how the local authority and registered providers will co-operate and work in partnership to help people in housing need and to prevent homelessness.

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**Non-qualifying person**

Someone who is not allowed to register with the scheme due to their behaviour or the behaviour of a member of their household.

**Partner**

A landlord that advertises the majority of their vacant homes through the lettings scheme or the Local Authority (Council) for that area.

**Priority Date**

The date when an applicant was given a priority band

**Reasonable Preference**

The phrase used in the Housing Act to describe those types of housing need that should be given priority in a local authority's allocations policy.

**Registration Date**

The date the application is received by one of the partners.

**Registered Provider (RP)**

A housing association or housing company registered with the Regulator of Social Housing

**Tees Valley Homefinder**

The IT system used by the partnership for registering applications and advertising properties.

## Section 1 – Introduction and Background

### 1.1 The Tees Valley Lettings Partnership

This policy has been developed by the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership, which is made up of the 5 local authorities and 3 registered provider partners who manage housing stock across the Tees Valley:

- Darlington Borough Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Middlesbrough Council
- Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Beyond Housing
- Home Group
- North Star

Beyond Housing, Darlington Borough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Home Group, and North Star will aim to advertise and seek to let the majority of their available general needs homes via this scheme. The contact details for all of these organisations are listed in **Appendix 1**.

In addition to the above, a number of additional Registered Providers (RP's) who are not partners in Tees Valley Lettings Partnership will advertise and seek to let at least 50% of their available homes in the Tees Valley on the scheme and these are known as 'Nominations'. RP's who advertise their properties are listed in **Appendix 2**.

### 1.2 Aims and objectives

By working together, we will strive to:

- Provide a consistent approach to allocating available homes of partner landlords and 'nomination properties';
- Improve access to safe and secure homes across the Tees Valley;
- Provide help for applicants to resolve issues which may cause barriers to housing and to tackle and prevent homelessness;
- Provide more choice in housing to residents in the Tees Valley and help to create sustainable, mixed communities where people choose to live; and
- Ensure that anyone applying for a home is provided with a first class housing service, which gives them a role in choosing a home which best suits their long-term housing needs.

The shared aims and objectives of this policy are:

- To meet our legal responsibilities as set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, Localism Act 2011 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017);  
To assist local authorities in preventing and reducing homelessness;
- To let homes of partner landlords and nomination properties in a fair and transparent way by empowering applicants and supporting them to make informed choices about where they want to live;
- To provide tailored services for people who may find it difficult to apply for housing and offer help in maintaining a successful tenancy;
- To improve local and sub regional mobility across the Tees Valley and to encourage balanced and sustainable communities; and
- To make efficient use of the social housing stock in meeting housing needs.

### **1.3 The Housing Register**

The Housing Register (referred to as 'the Register' throughout this document) is a single list of all the applicants who have registered and been accepted onto this scheme.

### **1.4 Statement on Choice**

Applicants will be allowed to apply for advertised homes both for rent and low cost home ownership options.

Our adverts will include good quality information about the property features, to allow applicants to make informed choices about which homes they would like to live in. The information on the lettings platform (website) will also include links to other useful information.

### **1.5 Affordability**

Applicants will only be offered properties which they can afford. This is partly linked to Welfare Reform which may reduce income and also aims to reduce hardship should personal circumstances change. When an applicant is offered a property, they will be asked to complete an affordability assessment to make sure they can afford the rent and other associated costs, to make sure that the tenancy is sustainable.

Applicants who fail affordability checks will be offered support, advice and assistance and may be signposted to external agencies such as Citizens Advice.

### **1.6 Equality and fairness**

We will ensure that our policies and practices do not discriminate in line with the Equality Act 2010. We will take measures to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to housing opportunities with the population as a whole.

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We will ensure that all applicants have access to information about the service and equal opportunity to register, apply for and receive offers of accommodation. We will do this by providing help, in the applicants preferred way, where the applicant may have difficulty completing paperwork, applying for a property or accessing our online services.

## **1.7 Meeting our obligations**

Our policy has been written to meet the legal requirements for the allocation of housing as set out in the Housing Act 1996 Part VI as amended by the Homeless Act (2002), the Localism Act 2011 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

This policy also has regard to the following:

- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: Homeless Code of Guidance
- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England (June 2012)
- Providing social housing for local people: Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (December 2013)
- Right to Move (2015) Statutory Guidance
- Childrens Act 1989 and Childrens Act 2004
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces (June 2020)
- The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) and Persons subject to Immigration Control (Housing Authority Accommodation and Homelessness) (Amendment) Regulations 2022

This Policy will be regularly reviewed and revised in the light of any relevant legislative changes or regulations issued by the Secretary of State and changes to the Codes of Guidance.

We will ensure that our policy meets our legal obligations. In addition, we will ensure that the policy is compatible with local, sub-regional and regional housing strategies, together with existing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategies across the sub region.

## **1.8 Advice and information**

A copy of this policy is available from any of the partner offices or can be downloaded from the website <http://teesvalleyhomefinder.org/>

Information about the scheme will be provided in a range of formats and languages to applicants upon request.

Applicants who do not have internet access can visit or call their local housing office and/or local authority for assistance or use the self-service access points (where available).

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## **1.9 Information sharing, confidentiality and data protection**

All information received relating to an applicant's housing circumstances will be treated as confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. Information will only be shared in accordance with our Information Sharing Protocols.

In dealing with an application for housing, we may need to contact other relevant agencies or organisations for further information (e.g. medical professionals, probation service, former or current landlords). This information may be shared with other partners as part of the registration process.

Where an applicant has difficulty communicating directly themselves, they can name an advocate (or interpreter) to communicate on their behalf.

## Section 2 – Joining the Housing Register

### 2.1 Who can register?

Anyone over the age of 16 years can apply to join the register, providing they are 'eligible' (see 2.2 & 2.3). Applicants do not need to have a connection with the Tees Valley area, although preference for housing will be given to applicants with a local connection (see section 4.6).

#### EEA

Citizens of the European Economic Area (EU member countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) or Switzerland are only entitled to access social housing if they have applied for and received 'settled status' under the Government's EU Settlement Scheme. This scheme enables such citizens, who were resident in the United Kingdom before 11pm on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, and their family members to apply for UK immigration status.

Before being accepted onto the housing register, such applicants must demonstrate their eligibility for social housing. Individuals that have applied for settled status can use an online checking service to create a code that can be shared with TVHF partners to prove their immigration status: [View and prove your immigration status - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/view-and-prove-your-immigration-status)

Newly arriving EEA citizens, who have moved to the UK since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, and their family members are not eligible for social housing, unless they have been granted indefinite leave to remain under UK immigration law, or have been exempted under the Eligibility Regulations, such as having refugee status.

NB – Irish citizens and their family members are able to continue to access social housing, irrespective of the EU Settlement Scheme, under the arrangements for the Common Travel Area. Confirmation of Irish citizenship will be sufficient to demonstrate this eligibility.

#### **Immigration status and entitlements of people arriving under the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine Scheme**

Those who are currently arriving in the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme or Homes for Ukraine Scheme are being granted leave outside the rules for an initial period of three years.

People with leave outside the rules have the right to work and have access to public funds without the requirement to satisfy the habitual residency test. They will therefore have access to benefits and will be eligible for homelessness assistance and social housing.



Emergency secondary legislation (**The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) and Persons subject to Immigration Control (Housing Authority Accommodation and Homelessness) (Amendment) Regulations 2022**) makes these groups eligible for homelessness assistance and social housing following commencement.

This Statutory Instrument also exempts those fleeing Ukraine who are British Nationals, other persons not subject to immigration control with a right of abode in the UK from the requirement to meet the habitual residence test when applying for these services.

These legislative changes have been made in parallel with changes to legislation regarding access to benefits and services.

Local authorities will need to continue checking eligibility of anyone who presents as homeless in the usual way. However, the changes made through these Regulations will mean that people arriving under the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine are eligible for social housing and homelessness assistance.

## 2.2 Ineligible Persons

Applicants need to meet the requirements of section 160ZA of the Housing Act 1996 which deals with the immigration status of people who have come to the United Kingdom from abroad.

For example, we cannot allow people who fall into one of the below 'ineligible' groups to join the register:

- People who are subject to immigration control unless they have been granted refugee status, exceptional or indefinite leave to remain, are the subject of a sponsorship undertaking;
- Some EEA nationals that are not eligible for social housing;
- People not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area unless they are exempt
- EU nationals required to leave the UK by the UK Government;
- An EEA national who has entered the UK as a job seeker or a family member of a job seeker; or
- An EEA national with an initial right to reside in the first 3 months' of residence; or
- An EEA national with a derivative right to reside on the basis of being a non-EEA national who is the primary carer of a British citizen child or dependent adult, where such child or dependent adult would be unable to live in the UK or another EEA state if their carer left the UK (a "Zambrano carer").

## 2.3 Non-qualifying person

Under the Localism Act 2011, we have the ability to decide who may not qualify for social housing in the area. People who fall into the following category may be assessed as a 'non-qualifying' person:

- an applicant (or a member of their household) who has been found guilty of unacceptable behavior that is serious enough for a landlord to pursue possession of the property had they been a tenant, will be classed as non-qualifying.

Unacceptable behavior includes relevant criminal convictions, anti-social behaviour or housing related debt of over £1,500.00 where no reasonable attempt to repay this debt has been made.

**Appendix 3** gives some more detail on what we consider as 'unacceptable' behaviour and the type evidence we will gather to ensure that each case is considered on an individual basis.

Applicants who owe less than £1,500.00 or have been found guilty of less serious anti-social behaviour may also not be allowed to apply for properties until they can demonstrate an improvement in their behaviour. See **Appendix 3** for further details.

## 2.4 Joint applications

Joint applications will be accepted, provided all applicants are eligible, aged 16 or over and intend to occupy the property together as their only or main home. The joint application will be assessed and placed in a priority band using the details of the household with the greatest housing need.

## 2.5 Multiple applications

Multiple applications are not allowed. A person can only be on the register with one 'Active' account.

## 2.6 Re-applying for housing

If an applicant has been housed via the scheme and then wishes to re-register, they would need to register a new application which will be assessed based on their new circumstances.

## 2.7 Requests to transfer to another home

Applicants who already rent from one of the partners (a current tenant) can register to move and will have their housing application considered by the relevant partner

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landlord, and may be subject to checks in line with the Tenancy Management Policies set out by their landlord.

## **2.8 Applications from employees/members and their close relatives**

Applications can be accepted from employees of partner organisations, elected members of local authorities, board members of Registered Provider partners and their close relatives, provided they meet the eligibility criteria set out above. Applicants must tell us about any such relationship at the time of registration. In order to ensure fairness, checks will be completed before any offer is made to people in this category.

## **2.9 How to apply and what happens**

Applications can be registered online by accessing the digital lettings platform <http://teesvalleyhomefinder.org/> or by contacting one of the partners for an appointment.

Once a completed application is received, we will ask for some documents to prove the applicants identity, address and circumstances. The application will then be assessed and placed in the Band that reflects the circumstances of the household. See section 3 for how we assess housing need.

## **2.10 Changes in circumstances**

It is the responsibility of the applicant (or their advocate) to tell us about any change in circumstances that could affect their application.

## **2.11 Keeping the Register up to date**

Applicants with a priority for housing will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are not having difficulties with the scheme and to check that they are applying for suitable properties as they come up.

Accounts that have been 'inactive' for a period of 12 months will be contacted via their preferred method to see if they still want to be considered for housing.

Failure to respond to a review may result in closure of the application and/or removal of a priority Band.

## **2.12 Cancelling applications**

Applications will be cancelled in the following circumstances:

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- A request has been received from the applicant (or their named advocate);
- There is no activity in the given time period and no response received;
- The applicant is deceased and s/he was the sole applicant;
- The applicant has bought their property through Right to Buy or Right to Acquire subsequent to applying for rehousing;
- An applicant has been assessed as non-qualifying (see **Appendix 3**)
- It is discovered that the applicant has given false or misleading information in their application; or
- There has been no response to correspondence sent to them.

Applicants will be given the reason why their application has been cancelled and informed of their right to request a review of the decision.

## **2.13 Giving false information or deliberately withholding information**

It is a criminal offence for anyone applying for housing from a housing authority to knowingly or recklessly give false information or knowingly withhold information which is relevant to their housing application (Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996).

Anyone found guilty of such an offence may be fined up to £5,000 and could lose the tenancy if they have been rehoused as a result of providing false information or deliberately withholding information.

The partnership will consider taking action against a professional organisation that provides false information or deliberately withholds information on behalf of an applicant they are representing.

Applicants who are found to have given false or misleading information will be made non-qualifying for 12 months and will need to submit a new application after this time.

## **2.14 Deliberate worsening of circumstances**

Any applicant who deliberately worsens their housing circumstances, will have any priority removed and will be placed into Band 4 for a period of six months.

Examples of worsening circumstances may include:

- Giving up a tenancy/secure housing for no good reason;
- Moving from a property that has been adapted for the needs of someone in the household to a property that does not have the required adaptations; and
- Moving into a property that is too small or large to meet the needs of the household.

*Please note – the above list is not exhaustive.*

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The applicant can ask for a reassessment of their band after this period, but would be responsible for providing evidence to support this.

## **2.15 Notifications about decisions and the right to a statutory review of a decision**

Applicants have the following rights about decisions made about their housing application:

- The right to be notified in writing of any decision not to be registered on the scheme;
- The right, on request, to be informed of a decision about any information which is being taken into account in considering whether to make an offer of accommodation; and
- The right to request a review of a decision made regarding their application.

The review will be carried out by the partner organisation that received the original application in line with their procedures. Applicants may also be entitled to a further review by the relevant local authority and they will be informed where this is the case.

## Section 3 – Assessing Housing Need

### 3.1 Legal background

To ensure that those with the highest level of housing need are given preference, we have considered the categories of people that must be given ‘reasonable preference’ by local authorities, as set out in s166a of the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002. These are:

#### **Reasonable Preference**

- People who are statutorily homeless;
- People who the Local Authority owe certain homeless duties to;
- People who live in insanitary or overcrowded homes;
- People who need to move for medical or welfare reasons; and
- People who need to move to avoid hardship.

#### **Additional Preference**

##### **HM Armed Forces Personnel**

We have taken into account Government guidance from The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 – Statutory Instrument No: 2989 that came into force on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012. This allows us to give an additional preference to people who have served in the Armed Forces.

This additional preference will be awarded to members of the HM Armed Forces community (serving, or has formerly served in the regular or reserve forces; a bereaved spouse/civil partner or a divorced spouse/civil partner) who are identified as having an urgent need for housing within 5 years of discharge.

### 3.2 The priority bands

The scheme has 4 Bands. All eligible applicants will have their circumstances assessed and will be placed in the relevant band, according to their level of housing need.

## **Band 1 Urgent Housing Need**

### **A People living in the Tees Valley who are losing their home due to demolition or regeneration**

This includes council tenants, registered provider tenants, private tenants and owner occupiers living within the boundary of a defined regeneration area who are required to move home, provided they have lived there, as their sole or main home, for at least 12 months. Proof of residency will be requested.

Applicants will only be given Band 1 priority for the local authority area where they live.

### **B People assessed as statutorily homeless and in priority need**

People who have been accepted as statutorily homeless and in priority need and where the main homeless duty is owed (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996). People in this category may receive a direct offer of housing.\*

### **C People who are owed the homelessness prevention or relief duty**

Applicants who, following assessment, are owed the homelessness prevention or relief duty.\*

\* once duty has been discharged through the refusal of a reasonable offer of accommodation, the applicant will be placed into Band 4. If the duty is discharged for any other reason, the applicant will be placed into the Band appropriate to their assessed housing needs.

### **D People at risk of domestic abuse**

Victims of domestic abuse who have lost their accommodation or who are at risk of losing their accommodation as a result of violence or a threat of violence. People in this category may receive a direct offer of housing.

### **E People leaving HM Armed Forces community**

People leaving the HM Armed Forces community. This will include a member of the Armed Forces (serving, or has formerly served in the regular forces; serving, or has formerly served in the reserved forces; a bereaved spouse/civil partner; divorced spouse/civil partner).

## **Band 2 High Housing Need**

### **A People who need to move on urgent medical grounds**

Applicants who have been assessed by one of the Partners as requiring alternative accommodation because their medical condition (physical or mental

health) and/or disability is having a significantly detrimental effect on their ability to live in their current home.

**B People assessed as ready for independent living**

Those who need to move as part of an agreed plan to re-integrate into the community e.g. people leaving supported and temporary housing projects.

People with learning disabilities who are assessed as having to move in order to receive care and support or where their current housing is having a detrimental effect on their quality of life and ability to live independently.

**C A household with a child in need or Care Leaver**

As defined in the Children Act 1989, where a formal referral has been made by Social Services with the aim of safeguarding the welfare of the child or children or a child/children leaving the care of the local authority under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

**D Adoptive parents or prospective adoptive parents/foster carers**

Those who need to move due to their current accommodation being unsuitable or who need to move to a different location to safeguard or promote the well-being of the child or children they have adopted or are planning to adopt or foster children in foster care.

**E People living in unacceptable housing conditions**

People who are living in accommodation where, following a property inspection by the local authority, an assessment has concluded that the property contains unacceptable hazards and it has a duty to take action.

**F Social housing tenants of the partner organisations that are under-occupying their accommodation by 2 or more bedrooms**

Calculations for under-occupancy will be based upon the number of people within the household and the criteria set out by the Department of Work and Pensions. Please see **Appendix 1** for details of partner organisations and **Appendix 4** for details of Under-occupation, overcrowding and additional bedrooms.

Applicants will only be considered for properties that fit their household's identified housing need.



## **Band 3: Medium housing need**

### **A People who need to move due to a high medical need**

People who have been assessed by one of the Partners as having a medical condition (physical or mental health) and/or a disability where a move to alternative accommodation would significantly improve their health.

### **B People living in overcrowded conditions**

Overcrowding is assessed on the number of people within the household and according to the best use of bedrooms and sleeping spaces available. See **Appendix 4**.

### **C Social housing tenants of the partner organisations that are under-occupying their accommodation by 1 bedroom**

Calculations for under-occupancy will be based upon the number of people within the household and the criteria set out by the Department of Work and Pensions. Please see **Appendix 1** for details of partner organisations and **Appendix 4** for details of under-occupation, overcrowding and additional bedrooms.

Applicants will only be considered for properties that fit their household's identified housing need.

### **D People who need to move on hardship grounds**

People who need to move to a particular area in order to take up an offer of employment, education or training, or to be nearer to family or friends in order to give or receive support, providing it is unreasonable to expect them to commute from their existing home.

People suffering financial hardship, e.g. if their income is insufficient to cover reasonable living expenses and financial commitments.

### **E People sharing facilities with persons not of the same household**

People sharing facilities with other people who are not members of the same household, for example:

- People living in houses in multiple occupation;
- Bed & Breakfast;
- Hostel; and
- Those who continue to live together following a relationship breakdown.

**Note:** Gypsies and Travellers will be considered under this category if they are sharing communal facilities e.g. WC or showers whilst residing on an authorised site.

## **Band 4: Low housing need**

A person whose current home is adequate to meet their basic housing needs in terms of lifestyle, size, design and location: or,

A person who has refused a reasonable offer of accommodation or worsened their own circumstances.

### **3.4 Making direct offers without advertising**

As well as applicants applying for advertised properties, there will also be circumstances in which some applicants will receive direct offers.

A direct offer may be made in exceptional circumstances, for example:

- Applicants assessed by the Local Authority as being owed a homelessness duty;
- People who need emergency accommodation due to fire, flood or major repairs;
- Ex-offenders subject to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), where a full support package is in place with other relevant statutory and voluntary organisations to enable them to be returned to the community; and
- People who are at an imminent risk of violence or a threat of violence e.g. victims of domestic abuse, hate related crime or through a witness protection scheme.

If an applicant refuses a direct offer of accommodation, they will only be given a 2<sup>nd</sup> offer in exceptional circumstances.

## **Section 4 – The Lettings Scheme**

### **4.1 Advertising properties on the lettings scheme**

Once an applicant has an active account, they can apply for available homes.

Adverts will be clearly labelled to show the property features, local neighbourhood information and the types of household that can apply for it. A photograph will usually be included with the advert.

Properties are sometimes advertised during a tenant's 4 week notice of termination period, and could be withdrawn from the scheme if the tenant changes their mind about moving.

There will sometimes be other restrictions in the advert e.g. age restrictions or adapted properties. Applications from applicants will only be considered if they can match the requirements in the advert.

Properties can be added to the site on any day of the week and will advertise for a minimum of 5 working days.

Where there is more than one property of the same description in the same location, only one advert will be displayed. The property advert will show that there are 'X' properties of the same type available at the same time. For example, if there are 2 or more flats available in a block or where there are a number of new build properties.

### **4.2 Adapted properties for people with disabilities**

Adapted properties are homes which have been designed or adapted to meet the needs of people with physical or sensory disabilities.

Applicants who have an assessed need for adapted properties will be given priority over others without that need and the property advert will make this clear. The advert will also describe the adaptations to help people choose whether to apply for that property or not.

### **4.3 Advertising Properties**

Available properties will be advertised daily on the scheme's interactive lettings platform and in displays at the partner landlords' housing offices or other agreed method.

Applicants (or their advocates) wanting to apply for a property can speak directly to a member of staff or use the interactive website. Applications will also be accepted by email or in person at any one of the partner organisation's housing receptions.

Applicants can apply for an unlimited amount of available properties, but will only be contacted if they are successful.

#### **4.4 Short-listing and selection**

At the end of the advertising period, a list of applicants will be produced.

Applications will usually be placed in Band order (ranked Band 1 - 4). If there are two or more applicants in the same Band, the date they entered the band (their priority date) will be used as a tie-breaker. In the case of decants, the applicant's occupancy date for their current property will be used as their priority date. If the priority date is the same for two or more applicants, the registration date will be used.

Some partners may use a quota system, which means that a percentage of their properties may give preference to Band 2, 3 or 4 first.

Local Lettings Policies may also affect the order of the shortlist (see 4.5).

#### **4.5 Local Lettings Policies**

In some cases, a home may be advertised with a Local Lettings Policy (LLP). This means that there may be certain qualities or characteristics that the landlord will be looking for when allocating the property.

An LLP is usually developed between the landlord, local authority and other agencies in order to achieve a specific aim for an area/estate or new build development. For example:

- where there is an issue with anti-social behavior on an estate, an LLP can be used to make sure that no more households with a history of anti-social behaviour are housed there until the area stabilises, or;
- for new build developments, an LLP can help us get the right mix of families on an estate.

Where a property has an LLP attached to it, we will state this on the advert and make this available for the applicant to read.

#### **4.6 Local connection**

Applicants will be counted as having a local connection to a local authority area if they fit one or more of the following categories:

- They live in the local authority area and have lived there for 6 out of the past 12 months or 3 out of the past 5 years;
- They have close family connections with someone living in the local authority area. A close family connection is defined as a parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, legal guardian; or
- Their regular place of work is located within any of the local authority areas.

Applicants with a local connection to the local authority area will be given priority for an offer before applicants who do not where they are in the same Band.

Applicants in temporary accommodation (e.g. probation hostels) will not usually have a local connection to that area unless they meet one of the criteria listed above or there are special circumstances, e.g. they have been placed into that accommodation by the Local Authority due to homelessness.

Applicants leaving the armed forces and victims of domestic abuse will not need to have a local connection. Divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence will also be exempted from local connection requirements. A local connection will be applied across all 5 Tees Valley Local Authorities for these applicants.

Applicants eligible under the Homes for Ukraine scheme will have local connection to the local authority of the host family that they were placed with.

#### **4.7 Viewing properties and refusing offers**

When an applicant has been selected for an offer, the landlord will contact them to arrange to view the property before deciding to accept it. Sometimes, more than one applicant may be invited to view.

If an applicant who has been given priority for housing refuses an offer that meets their housing need and this refusal is considered to be unreasonable, they may have their priority removed and be placed in Band 4 for a period of six months.

#### **4.8 Time allowed for accepting an offer**

Applicants will usually be allowed 2 working days to respond to an offer, but individual circumstances will be taken into account and applicants with specific needs will be given more time e.g. if an assessment for adaptation works is needed or someone with a disability needs more time to consider the move.

## **Section 5 – Other housing options**

Where possible, we will offer other affordable housing options to applicants who approach us for help with housing as many may have to wait a considerable time before being successful in receiving an offer.

Applicants can also consider the following housing options;

### **Private landlords**

Homes owned by private sector landlords who are members of a recognised local authority good landlord scheme i.e. accredited/charter etc. may be advertised on the scheme with the approval of the Local Authority. The adverts will make clear that the properties will be offered on an assured shorthold tenancy agreement and are managed and maintained by a private sector landlord.

### **Non-partner Registered Providers**

As noted previously Registered Providers who are not members of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership will advertise and seek to let at least 50% of their available homes on the scheme in line with Nomination Agreements agreed with the Local Authority. . Details of these Registered Providers can be found in **Appendix 2**.

### **Low Cost and Shared Ownership**

Low cost and shared ownership products may be advertised on the scheme. Applicants will be considered for these products providing they meet the eligibility criteria determined by central government.

### **Home Swaps (Mutual exchanges)**

Applicants who currently rent from one of the Partner organisations can apply to swap their homes with another tenant. For more details, please contact your landlord.

## Appendix 1 – Contact Information

Any queries in relation to this policy can be directed to partner organisations via the contact details below:

 <b>DARLINGTON</b> Borough Council	Town Hall Feethams Darlington DL1 5QT	☎ 01325 405 333  ✉ <a href="mailto:housing@darlington.gov.uk">housing@darlington.gov.uk</a>  🌐 <a href="http://www.darlington.gov.uk">www.darlington.gov.uk</a>
 <b>HARTLEPOOL</b> BOROUGH COUNCIL	Housing Waiting List Team  Civic Centre  Hartlepool	☎ 01429 806834  ✉ <a href="mailto:housingwaitinglist@hartlepool.gov.uk">housingwaitinglist@hartlepool.gov.uk</a>  🌐 <a href="http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk">www.hartlepool.gov.uk</a>
   <b>Stockton-on-Tees</b> BOROUGH COUNCIL	Lettings & Nominations Team (for Middlesbrough & Stockton)  16 Church Road  Stockton-on-Tees  TS18 1TX	☎ 01642 528730  ✉ <a href="mailto:housing@stockton.gov.uk">housing@stockton.gov.uk</a>
	Housing Advice & Information Service Belmont House Rectory Lane Guisborough TS14 7FD	☎ 01287 612 444  ✉ <a href="mailto:housing_clientservices@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk">housing_clientservices@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk</a>  🌐 <a href="http://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk">www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk</a>
	14 Ennis Square Dormanstown	

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	Redcar TS10 5JR	☎ 0345 065 5656  ✉ enquiries@beyondhousing.co.uk  🌐 <a href="http://www.beyondhousing.co.uk">www.beyondhousing.co.uk</a>
	Halifax House Falcon Court Preston Farm Business Park Stockton-on-Tees TS18 3TS	☎: 0345 141 4663  🌐 <a href="http://www.homegroup.org.uk">www.homegroup.org.uk</a>
	Endeavour House St Marks Court Thornaby Stockton-on-Tees TS17 6QN	☎ 0300 011 0011  ✉ customerservices@northstarhg.co.uk  🌐 <a href="http://www.northstarhg.co.uk">www.northstarhg.co.uk</a>



## **Appendix 2 – Non-Partner Registered Providers**

Detailed below are Registered Providers with property across the Tees Valley who will advertise and seek to let at least 50% of their available homes using the scheme. .

Anchor-Hanover

Bernicia

Broadacres

Castle & Coasts

Clarion

Habinteg

Hellens Residential

Housing & Care 21

Karbon

Livin

Newalk CIC

Places for People

Railway Housing

Salvation Army Housing Association

Thirteen

Please note that this this Appendix will be updated on a regular basis to reflect new Registered Providers who may acquire existing or build new housing stock across the Tees Valley.

## **Appendix 3 – Non-qualifying person and suspended applicants**

### Non-qualifying applicant

If the applicant (or a member of their household) is found to be guilty of ‘unacceptable’ behaviour, they may be excluded from the housing register for 12 months. Some examples of unacceptable behavior are listed below (this is not a complete list);

- Convictions for some drug related offences\*;
- Convictions for violent criminal offences which would be considered a threat to the community\*;
- Convictions for sex offences which would be considered a threat to the community\*;
- Any other conviction which would in our opinion, pose a threat to a community\*;
- Perpetrator of domestic abuse
- Perpetrator of abuse, violence or threats towards a member of staff;
- History of anti-social behaviour;
- Housing debt in excess of £1,500.00 which includes rent arrears, court costs, rechargeable repairs;
- An eviction on the grounds of Schedule 2 of the Housing Act; and
- Providing false or misleading information.

\*Spent convictions will not be considered during our assessment.

Each case will be considered on an individual basis and exceptional circumstances will be considered. Before a decision is made to make an applicant non-qualifying, we will suspend the application while we gather evidence such as references from current or previous landlords, rent statements, photographic evidence of damages, and information from Police/Probation or complete any other required investigations we need to complete to make our decision.

### Suspended applicant

If an applicant is made non-qualifying, they will be informed in writing of the reasons for this decision, the period of non-qualification and what can be done to rectify the situation. Applicants who have been made non-qualifying can appeal this within 21 days of the date of the notification.

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Applicants who are guilty of less serious behaviour may have their application suspended for a specified period of time. This means that applicants will be allowed to register, but would not be able to apply for a home until they had complied with a repayment plan for debts or had a clear behaviour record.

If an application is to be suspended, the applicant will be informed of the reasons for the decision, the period of suspension and what can be done to rectify the situation.

Applicants are expected to make an effort to modify their behaviour before they are able to apply for available properties. After the initial suspension period, the applicant will be contacted to see if they have complied with a repayment schedule.

The table below gives some examples of suspension and non-qualification periods which may be implemented for those with housing debt;

Behaviour	Consequence
Eviction from a tenancy in the last 6 years	Non-qualifying for 12 months
Evidence of serious anti-social behaviour within the last 2 years.	Non-qualifying for 12 months
Housing debt of £1,500.00 or more where no effort has been made to repay	Non-qualifying for 12 months or until the debt has been repaid in full
Housing debt of £1,500.00 or more where the applicant is making repayments	Suspended for 12 months or until the debt has been repaid in full
Housing debt between £500.00-£1,499.99	Suspended for 6 months or until the debt has been repaid in full
Housing debt of less than £500.00	Suspended for 3 months or until the debt has been repaid in full
Moderate-low level anti-social behaviour	Suspension for 3-6 months

Applicants who have been suspended will be notified of the decision and the reasons for this decision will be given in writing. An applicant will be able to request a review of the decision to 'suspend' their application. Each case will be considered on an individual basis and exceptional circumstances will be considered.

## **Appendix 4 – Under-occupation, Overcrowding & Additional Bedrooms**

Under-occupation and overcrowding will be assessed based upon the number of people within the household and according to best use of the bedrooms to reflect the criteria set out by the Department of Work and Pensions.

One bedroom will be considered suitable for:-

- An Adult /Adult Couple;
- Two children of the same sex under the age of 16;
- Two children under the age of 10 regardless of their sex;
- Any other person aged 16 or over; or
- Any other child that cannot be matched with the above.

*Please note:* This assessment does not include living room space unless there is a second living room which can be used as a bedroom and it does not breach health and safety standards. Where a bedroom is being used for another purpose e.g. study or toy room, its original function as a bedroom will be used in assessing the level of under occupation or overcrowding.

The main householder(s) will be expected to share a bedroom with a child under the age of 12 months.

### **Additional Bedrooms**

There may be some circumstances where a household is allowed an extra bedroom as detailed below:

- Health reasons;
- Bedroom for an overnight carer;
- Joint custody or overnight access to a child/children; or
- Prospective adopters and foster carers.

Where one of the above applies, evidence will be requested and an affordability check may need to be completed to make sure the applicant can afford the additional bedroom.

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