



# Consultation on the Housing Allocation Scheme

Simple, understandable,  
fair and transparent...



**Birmingham City Council is changing  
the way it allocates homes and wants  
to hear your views.**

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## What is the Housing Allocation Scheme?

The council is required by law to have a housing allocation scheme, which shows how it prioritises allocation of social housing and the procedures that will be followed. The scheme is directed by legislation and guidance from the government. It requires that certain groups be given 'reasonable preference' within the scheme.

These groups include:

- Those living in unsatisfactory housing which is, for example, overcrowded or lacking facilities.
- Those who need to move on medical grounds.
- Those who are homeless.
- Those who need to move to a particular locality within the local authority area where it would cause hardship if they were unable to do so.

## Background

In Birmingham the demand for social housing dramatically exceeds availability; there are many more people who need a home or who want to move home, than there are homes available for them. There are also not enough homes owned by the council and its partners (housing associations) to offer housing to those who need it most.

In July 2013 approximately 30,000 households were waiting for social housing. About 6,000 social homes become available for rent each year, most of which are one or two bedroom flats. There are around five times as many waiting as there are vacancies each year. The demand for social homes dramatically exceeds available supply; the reality is that a significant number of those waiting will never be housed.

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## Why do we need to change the allocation scheme?

It is important that the allocation scheme is an effective and fair method for allocating social housing. Since the current scheme became operational in 2009, experience of administering it and feedback from customers has identified problems in how the scheme operates:

- It leads many customers to have unrealistic expectations of being offered a social tenancy, as the actual prospect is often very limited. Consequently they remain on the housing register for long periods of time which is costly for the council to administer and can give customers false expectations.
- It is difficult for existing tenants who need to move to gain an offer.



- The scheme has an overly complex point-based system of assessing need that confuses customers.
- It does not make best use of the social housing stock available to the city.

We have reviewed our scheme with the intention of developing a new scheme that is better suited to the needs of the city.

The council is consulting on changes to its Housing Allocation Scheme and is seeking responses to these changes.

Changing the way that we allocate social housing is one part of a new approach to meeting housing need in the city. In addition to a new allocation scheme we are working to improve the housing advice we offer so that it is realistic and personalised – helping people to find suitable housing in the location of their choice; establishing a social lettings agency to make the private rented sector a viable option for more households and reshaping our homeless services to improve the quality of emergency accommodation and to enable households to access suitable accommodation to resolve their homelessness as quickly as possible.

## 1. What is changing?

### **Scheme objectives**

The proposed new allocation scheme aims to be simple, fair, transparent and understandable. The scheme will include a set of published objectives. These objectives are to:

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- Enable fair access to social housing for applicants in housing need as defined by the scheme.
- Enable the best use of the council's and partners' registered housing stock.
- Be realistic and informed by stock availability.
- Operate within the legal and regulatory frameworks for the allocation of social housing.
- Operate a simple and understandable assessment system.

***Please refer to Question 1 of the questionnaire***

## 2. Qualifying for an allocation

Currently everyone who applies to the council for housing is added to the housing register. Each year the register continues to grow as not enough homes become available for rent each year to meet the demand.

The council is proposing that access to social housing will only be given to those who qualify under the scheme. In most circumstances, the following households will not qualify to join the housing register and therefore will not qualify for an allocation of social housing:

- 2.1** Those who do not have a 'social housing need'.\*  
\* Social housing need as defined by the proposed 'single needs assessment' outlined in point 5 of this document.
- 2.2** Those with a history of unacceptable behaviour.
- 2.3** Those that cannot legally hold a tenancy.
- 2.4** Those that have previously refused two suitable offers of social housing.
- 2.5** Those with an income or assets above a certain level.
- 2.6** Those with no connection to Birmingham.

For those that do not qualify for social housing, advice on alternative housing options will be offered.

**Please refer to Questions 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 of the questionnaire**

### 3. Assessment

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires councils to give certain groups of applicants a reasonable amount of preference (a head start) over other groups of applicants. This includes people living in unsatisfactory housing, those who need to move on welfare or medical grounds, homeless people and those who would face hardship unless they moved to a particular locality within the local authority’s area.

This is referred to as ‘granting reasonable preference’. The criteria the council will use is set out within the scheme.

#### Overcrowding

The council is proposing to change the way overcrowding is assessed. The current Allocations Code of Guidance recommends that all councils should adopt the ‘bedroom standard’ for allocating purposes. The bedroom standard states that a separate bedroom is required for the following:

- a. Two people living together as a couple (same sex or the opposite sex).
- b. A person aged 21 years or more.
- c. Two people of the same sex aged ten years to 20 years.
- d. Two people (whether of the same sex or not) aged less than ten years.
- e. Two people of the same sex where one person is aged between ten years and 20 years and the other is aged less than ten years.
- f. Any person aged under 21 years in any case where he or she cannot be paired with another occupier of the dwelling so as to fall within (c), (d) or (e) above.

#### Measure of overcrowding

There are severe levels of overcrowding within Birmingham; in April 2013 there were 11,417 households registered for social housing experiencing some form of overcrowding, 2,929 were short by two or more bedrooms. Consequently, the council is proposing not to award a reasonable preference to households who are only one bedroom short against the bedroom standard. Instead we are proposing to only award a reasonable preference for overcrowding to applicants who are two or more bedrooms short. This will reduce the number of overcrowded households on the housing register and thereby improve the chances of other housing applicants in extreme housing need receiving an allocation. This includes applicants,



for example, with severe medical difficulties that are affected by their current home, applicants escaping violence and children in need.

***Please refer to Questions 3 and 3.1 of the questionnaire***

## 4. Local Priorities

It is now possible for councils to consider local priorities within their allocation schemes as well as ensuring that a reasonable preference is given. Councils may do this providing local priorities do not dominate the scheme, and overall, the scheme operates to give reasonable preference to those in the statutory reasonable preference categories over those who are not. The over 55s seeking accommodation for older people and former Armed Forces personnel without reasonable preference may be considered for the City of Birmingham priority award (see below for definition).

***Please refer to Question 4 of the questionnaire***

## 5. Cumulative Need

The current scheme operates a points system, comprising of 33 point-based awards. Each applicant is assessed across this point-based system; their points are then added together to identify their 'cumulative need', which indicates their position on the housing register. The assessment process is resource intensive and incredibly complex, as it is not easy for applicants to understand their position on the housing register in relation to others. The council is proposing to move to a single needs assessment where the highest need in the household will determine the award. The 33-point award system will be replaced by four bands, which will be used to determine priority.

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The bands are:

- Band 1** People who have a reasonable preference and are granted additional preference (very urgent need to move).
- Band 2** People who need to move and fall within one of the reasonable preference categories.
- Band 3** Certain homeless households to whom the council must award reasonable preference.
- Band 4** Want to move – no reasonable preference but qualify for City of Birmingham priority award.

***Please refer to Questions 5 and 5.1 of the questionnaire***

## 6. Larger Properties

Very few larger homes (four bedrooms or more) become available for rent each year. There is a high demand for larger homes. In February 2013 some 3,078 applicants were seeking a home with four or more bedrooms. Of this 2,082 included applicants with non-dependent adults. The council is proposing changes to allow the demand for larger homes to be realistically managed.

### Family Members

The council proposes that it no longer includes adult household members outside of the immediate family for the purposes of assessing the size of property that is required or for assessing their housing need. Exceptional circumstances will apply.

The immediate family will include:

- The main applicant (or applicants).
- The main applicant’s spouse or partner. Partner means a person the applicant lives with, or with whom the applicant would live as a couple if able to do so. This includes mixed-gender and same-sex couples, whether or not applicants are married or in a civil partnership.
- The applicant’s child(ren) or applicant’s partner’s child(ren) must live with the applicant all the time or, for dependent children, the applicant must be their principal carer. Appropriate legal documentation will be required to confirm residency along with appropriate evidence of receipt of income for the child(ren).

**Please refer to Question 6.1 of the questionnaire**

## 7. Choice Based Lettings

The council will continue to operate its **Choice Based Lettings** system. The majority of applicants will be able to bid for a home using choice based lettings. The amount of choice that the council is able to offer is limited by the acute social housing shortage in Birmingham and the responsibilities owed to some groups in housing need. Applicants are able to express a preference for a particular type of property and the area in which they would like to live. However applicants should be aware that the council’s ability to satisfy expressed preferences might be severely limited.

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There are some circumstances when this will not apply and the council will either restrict access to bidding (**‘restricted bidding’**); make bids on behalf of an applicant (**‘assisted bidding’**) or make **‘direct offers’**. The council reserves the right to do this at any time. Applicants are encouraged to bid for properties over a wide geographical area of the city and to also consider properties in the private rented sector if they require a specific area where demand is high.

Applicants will be required to state areas within Birmingham where they believe they cannot live due to an evidenced risk of violence, harassment or domestic abuse. This will assist the council in making more informed decisions regarding restricted bidding, assisted bidding and direct offers. It will also help support officers who may be assisting an applicant to bid, to know where not to express an interest in properties.



## 7. Choice Based Lettings (continued...)

### Assisted Bidding

The council is proposing to place bids on behalf of applicants (assisted bidding) in certain circumstances. This may include where applicants have not placed bids themselves over a period of time, or for homeless households.

When bidding on behalf of an applicant or making a direct offer, the council will normally take into account the following factors:

- The number of bedrooms required.
- Any essential requirement concerning the type or location of housing.
- The housing band into which the applicant has been assessed.

The council will not normally take into account:

- Non-essential preferences about the location or type of property requested by the applicant.

### Suitable Offers

For the purpose of this scheme, an offer will be regarded by the council as suitable if it:

- Is of the right size.
- Has not been made in error by the council.
- Is accepted by the council as not presenting any risk to the applicant due to its particular location.

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*Please refer to Questions 7 and 7.1 of the questionnaire*



Consultation dates: 25 November 2013 to 17 February 2014.

Fill in the questionnaire at:

**[birmingham.gov.uk/allocation](http://birmingham.gov.uk/allocation)**

**If you would like help to understand this information or fill in the survey, ask at your local neighbourhood office or housing advice centre.**