

Camden's Housing Allocations Review consultation – the results

Camden Council is in the process of reviewing how we allocate council and housing association housing in the borough.

During the first half of 2013 we asked residents and partners what they thought about some of the changes we could make. More than 450 people and organisations responded.

As a result, some changes were agreed by our Cabinet in October 2013, which are explained below. More changes might be made when our review process comes to an end in 2014.

What we did

The consultation period ran from mid-March to late-April 2013. We did:

1. a survey on-line and at customer access points;
2. a series of four focus groups;
3. attended local voluntary and community groups;
4. a series of events aimed at Camden District Management Committees, partner housing associations and elected members.

What we asked

We asked:

- Should we restrict who can apply for social housing?
- Should we apply sanctions to applicants who fail to bid or fail to show for viewings?
- Who should be given priority for housing above and beyond the groups defined by law?
- Should we adopt a banding scheme?

Who responded?

We heard from Camden residents of all ages and backgrounds. In total:

- 435 people responded to our survey.
- 51 people took part in our focus groups

- We visited eight local community groups
- More than 60 participants attended special events

What you said

1. You support us restricting access to the housing register for some groups of people. For example, people in rent arrears, or those on a high income, or with savings. But individual circumstances should always be taken into account.
2. You support us doing our best to encourage people to bid and turn up for viewings but before imposing sanctions we should improve the way we advertise properties and arrange viewings.
3. You want us to prioritise people who have lived in Camden and been on the register for a long time. You also want us to prioritise carers for the elderly, disabled or seriously ill people and over-crowded households with children, foster carers and under-occupiers.
4. You don't really mind whether we have a points or a banding scheme as long as the system is clear, fair and transparent. We should improve the information we give to applicants to help them understand their chances of securing housing better.

A full analysis of the results is available at camden.gov.uk/allocations-reviews

What we did

The changes aim to:

- bring the scheme into line with recent legislative changes
- make aspects of our scheme clearer, fairer and more robust
- improve the way we administer our scheme

In particular:

1. We are taking steps to tackle under-occupation

Tackling under-occupation frees up larger homes for households who need larger homes such as the overcrowded. Under-occupying tenants will be awarded extra points to help them secure a smaller home. Sometimes a direct offer might be made. We will reserve and improve the condition of some smaller homes for under-occupiers. In future, most applicants won't be able to bid for homes with more rooms than they would receive benefit for.

2. We will help people who need to move due to development work

Some households find themselves affected by large scale housing improvement works. We are helping local families manage this disruption by allowing some adult

children living at home to be allocated their own home if their family home is affected. Sometimes, a direct offer might be made.

3. We are going to restrict access to our register for small numbers of people

Recent legislation enables councils to restrict who can apply on to their housing register by introducing qualification criteria. The idea of introducing qualification criteria was widely supported by consultation participants. The changes will allow us to formalise our current practice of excluding those in significant rent arrears. Additional qualification criteria may be introduced in 2014.

4. We are helping foster families, prospective adoptive parents and care leavers

Foster carers told us they often cannot foster more children because they lack bedroom space in their home. To enable us to recruit the carers and adoptive parents we need, we will set aside a small number of homes for carers who would foster or adopt more children if they had the room to do so. We will also increase the priority awarded to care leavers to enable them to secure the home they need.

5. We are helping people move on from supported accommodation

People in supported housing told us that they struggle to move on when they are ready to live independently. As a result, we will increase the priority awarded to some groups of people with support needs that should help them secure a home when they need it. We will set aside a small number of homes for people with learning difficulties who are ready to live independently.

6. We are helping older people

Older people told us our forms take a long time to fill out and are difficult to understand. As a result, we will create a simplified form that should be easier to use. We will allow older people who don't yet need sheltered housing to access some housing association sheltered studio flats.

7. We will improve the application process

We heard that housing applicants would like more accurate information about their chances of securing housing. As a result, we will provide fuller information to applicants on their chances of securing housing when they apply. We will also allow people to close their applications when they are no longer seeking social housing, reducing the number of applicants on the housing needs register.

8. We will improve the lettings process

We often have to rearrange viewings because applicants don't attend or decide to refuse properties that they see. Applicants told us they would appreciate more information about the size of rooms or the lay-out before bidding. As a result, we will improve our adverts by including more information about the property. Applicants

also told us that they sometimes didn't receive information about viewings. We will aim to give applicants at least four days' notice of viewings but may need to give shorter notice in some circumstances. We will offer a choice of two viewing times. This should increase attendance at viewings.

Next steps

We will be continuing our review of the housing allocations process throughout the first half of 2014. If you wish to be kept informed of progress, please email hsu@camden.gov.uk or call the housing strategy unit on 020 7974 5519.