

Changing our housing allocation scheme

**We
want your
views**



If you have any queries or need help to complete the survey, contact our Housing Strategy Unit on **020 7974 5519** or **email hsu@camden.gov.uk**

We are looking at how we allocate social housing (council and housing association homes) in Camden.

By law, we must explain in writing who can apply for social housing, who gets priority, and how we are making sure it is allocated to the people who need it most. We do this in our Housing Allocation Scheme.

Everyone who applies for housing in Camden goes on a list known as the housing register. Currently over 25,000 households are on the list, and this number is growing each year. On average we only have around 1,100 homes available each year.

We have decided to look at how we allocate social housing because:

- The housing register keeps growing. Many of those who apply are very unlikely to get a home and over a quarter don't live in Camden.

- Lots of people on the register seem to have an urgent need for housing, but aren't actively looking for a home.

- Lots of people don't turn up to view homes or refuse homes they're offered.

- It's not always clear to people what chance they have of getting a home.

- Some homes go to people who're not in the greatest need.



Recent changes in the law have given us greater flexibility to decide who can apply for housing and who should be given priority. Your responses to this survey will influence the new scheme.

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Thinking about who can apply for social housing in Camden

Currently people who apply for social housing in Camden and meet the basic criteria are automatically added to the housing register. However, only a small proportion of these people have realistic chance of getting social housing. Having so many people on the register is one of the reasons we spend a lot of time and money dealing with enquiries from applicants. Being on the housing register can also give applicants false hope.

People not entitled to claim benefits in the UK are already prevented from applying for housing. We are thinking of introducing more requirements. For example, we could exclude people who already live in homes that are suitable for their needs or who have no connection with Camden.

-  We could concentrate on helping those in greatest need with a strong local connection to Camden.
-  Applicants turned down may need housing. They might challenge the council's decision which could increase costs.

Key facts

- More than 3,500 new applications for social housing in Camden are made every year.

- Over 25,000 households have applied for housing.
 - 48% are in the groups the law says the council must prioritise.

 - 27% have not lived in Camden for the last two years.

 - One in five of the council tenants who've applied have rent arrears.

 - Only 1,100 households secure a home each year.

 - 83% are in groups the law says the council must prioritise.



 - 94% have lived in Camden for at least two years.

- It costs us around £135,500 a year to deal with queries from housing applicants.

Looking at closing some people's applications for housing

We currently allocate social housing using a 'choice based lettings' (CBL) system. This allows people who've applied for housing to bid for homes they're interested in. We then offer a home to the bidder with the highest priority. Lots of applicants with high priority do not bid for properties that are suitable for them and many applicants who do bid miss viewings or refuse homes offered to them. Sometimes further viewings have to be arranged or the property has to be advertised again. This costs us time and money and means other people who are interested in that home may not be able to see it.

We are thinking about penalising applicants who are not able to give a good reason for not bidding, missing viewings or turning down reasonable offers by closing their application or reducing their priority. If they were removed from the register, they would need to wait a set amount of time before they could apply again.

-  This could encourage applicants to think carefully about their choices and avoid delays in people moving into homes and wasting time and money.
-  This would limit applicants' ability to bid for as many properties as they want, miss viewings or turn down properties.

Key facts

- Only around half of applicants in the highest need bid.
 - About half of the applicants invited to viewings don't attend.
 - About half of those who view properties say they would not accept the home if it was offered to them.
 - More than one in five of homes have to be re-advertised, costing us at least £75,000 a year.
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Thinking about who is given priority for housing

By law, when we allocate housing we are required to give the highest priority to the groups it defines as the most in need – for example, people who are homeless, overcrowded or need to move for medical reasons.

When there are people who have a similar level of need based on these legal requirements, we can then look at other factors to decide who has the highest priority for housing. How we make this decision is important as every time we give priority to one person another person may lose out.

Our housing allocations scheme sets out what other factors we can take in to account when working out the level of priority given to a person's application.

- ✓ Looking at a range of factors also allows us to set our own local priorities for how we allocate social housing.
- ✗ It might be complicated for us to decide who should get higher priority and for applicants to understand their priority if there are a lot of factors to consider.

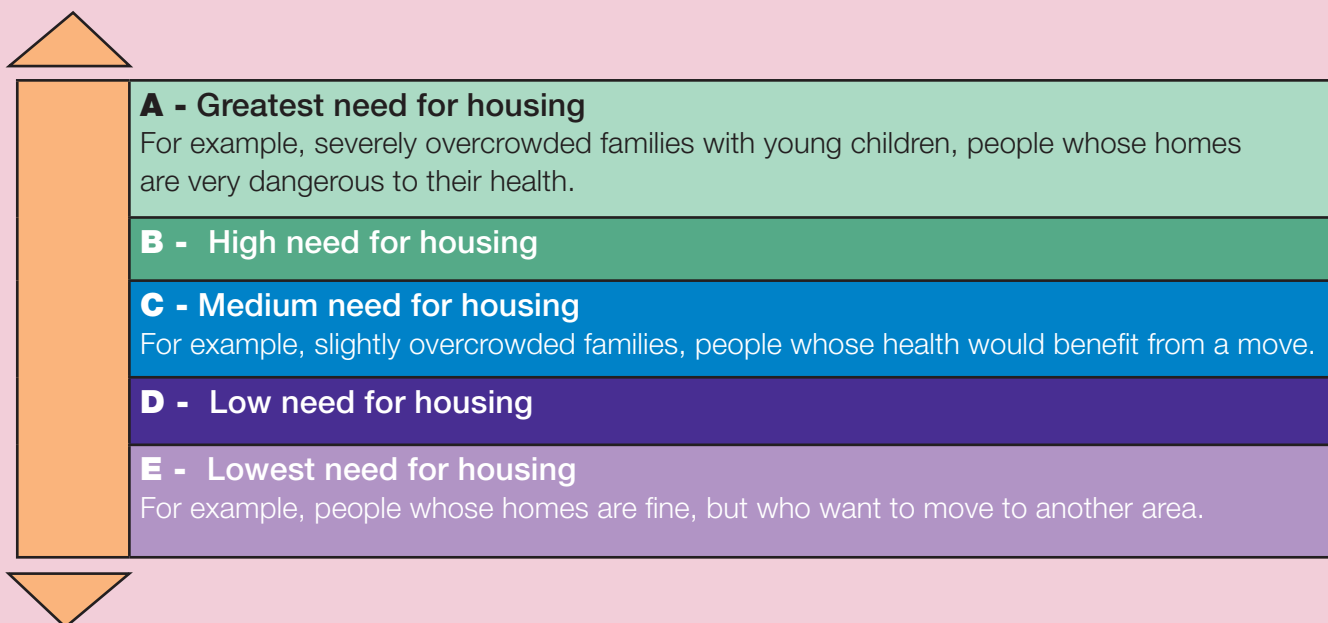
Key facts

- We have had to turn away up to four out of five people interested in foster caring because they couldn't get a big enough home.
 - 36% of those who got a home in the last three years were in work or training.
 - About one in five homes go to people who're not in the groups the law says are in most need. Over 80% of those people have built up enough priority to get a home by being on the housing register for a long time.
 - About a quarter of the people who get housing because they're overcrowded have only grown up children living with them.
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Looking at changing to a banding scheme

An example of a banding scheme

Greatest priority for social housing



Lowest priority for social housing

At the moment we award points to housing applicants, depending on their need for housing, the time they've lived in Camden and how long ago they applied for housing. The applicants with the most points have the highest priority and greatest chance of getting a home. Some people who've always lived in Camden and made a housing application a long time ago get homes even though they need them less than others. We get a lot of enquiries about points from people who want to know what their point score means or how many more points they need to get a home, even though a lot of them will never have enough points.

Other councils have moved to a banding scheme to work out applicants' level of priority. These schemes group applicants with similar levels of need together. Applicants in the highest band are most likely to get a home and people who've been in that band the longest time have the highest priority. This means how much an applicant needs housing always counts for more in their chance of getting a home than the time they've lived in a place or how long ago they applied for housing, although those factors can also be taken into account. Bands also make it easier for people to understand their chance of being housed because they rank applicants by priority, whereas points only tell them their chance if they know how many points everyone else on the register has.

✓ Applicants may find a banding scheme is easier to understand. It makes their chances of getting a home clearer.

✗ Initially, it may be unsettling for current applicants as their points are converted to a band.

Key facts

- 21% of homes let in the last five years have gone to applicants not in the the groups the law says we must prioritise.
- We get around 20,000 calls, emails, letters and complaints each year from people asking about their points.

Contact the Housing Strategy Unit on 020 7974 5519 or email
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