

Allocations Strategy Policy

Background

Since publication of the Government Housing Green Paper “Quality and Choice” in 2000, local authorities and housing associations have been encouraged to introduce greater choice to housing applicants in the allocation of social rented housing.

Local Authorities (LA's) are expected to have introduced choice-based lettings schemes by 2010, and housing associations are expected to co-operate with these schemes. Thames Valley Housing introduced the concept of providing greater choice in its review of the lettings policy in 2004, approved by the Board and Residents Consultative Group (RCG) that year.

This allocations strategy develops the existing lettings policy and takes account of the development of choice-based lettings by LA partners. A pre requisite to the development of more consistent and effective choice-based allocations systems is that LA's develop Housing Registers that permit all applications for social rented housing to be made through a central register whether they are from current tenants wishing to transfer or applicants seeking to enter social housing.

These new working arrangements make the older more established process of giving the LA 100% nomination rights to allocate to new developments and 75% nomination rights to subsequent re-lettings redundant. To develop choice-based systems and deliver effective local or special lettings policies requires a central point of entry with specific regard to local circumstances.

Strategy Objectives

Thames Valley Housing's objectives in the allocation of social rented housing are to :

- Facilitate choice of accommodation for people who are in the greatest housing need who have very limited housing options
- Assist LA's in the delivery of their homeless and housing strategies.
- Support groups in housing need who are particularly disadvantaged in the allocation of rented housing, and to provide a source of housing to other organisation's assisting those in housing need.
- Ensure that access into housing is fair and equitable and promotes equality
- Continue to build sustainable communities.
- Develop local lettings or special lettings plans that are scheme specific and promote scheme and local sustainability
- Optimises the use of TVCHA stock to meet housing need

Choice-Based Lettings

TVCHA's policy is to co-operate with and support the introduction of choice-based lettings schemes (CBL) by LA's. TVCHA has been a full member of the West London CBL scheme "Locata" for over a year, and all accommodation vacancies in Hounslow and other west London boroughs are advertised through Locata. Locata also operates a mutual exchange scheme, which TVCHA joined in 2006.

Many other local authorities in TVCHA's geographical area have either established or are in the process of setting up CBL schemes. Guildford Borough Council has been leading the Blackwater Valley project with the aim of developing a CBL scheme to include Rushmoor, Waverley and Hart. This scheme became operational in March 2007.

The scheme allows all applicants for social housing whether they are new or current tenants seeking a transfer a single point of entry to access all housing stock contained within the Blackwater Valley area. Additionally it promotes greater mobility across the Blackwater area by providing 10% of all vacant properties for cross LA boundary nominations

There are currently strategic discussions to develop a pan London CBL.

Transfers

With the increasing prevalence of choice-based lettings and in the drive to further promote choice across a range of areas the traditional nominations agreements are becoming redundant. All existing residents can bid for vacancies alongside applicants within LA Housing Registers. Choice-based lettings schemes are more transparent, and applicants can therefore make more informed choices with a greater degree of transparency about what stock is available.

Thames Valley Housing no longer operates a transfer waiting list but gives 90% of vacant properties to the LA.

The retained potential of 10% of re lettings is reserved for urgent mobility moves across local authority boundaries, for example, because of harassment or domestic violence. These will be supported under the terms of the Management Transfer Policy.

Ethnic Monitoring Policy

In order to ensure that within the range of allocations undertaken that equality of opportunity is always consistently provided, records of the ethnic origin of successful allocations and refusals of accommodation are kept and compared with the relevant local authority population analysis from the 2001 Census. Records are compared with the Census analysis at local ward level in the following instances:

- Local authority areas with a total black and minority ethnic (BME) population exceeding 9%;
- Wards in which new developments are situated;
- Wards in areas with a total BME population of less than 9% but where the number of lettings in that local authority area exceeds 50 per year.

The trigger of 9% is equivalent to the weighted BME population across the areas in which Thames Valley Housing has properties. Ethnic monitoring in the remaining areas will be at local authority wide level. In the event of the

percentage of BME nominations being less than the overall census figure, a detailed ward analysis will be undertaken. A review with the local authority will be sought in the event of the percentage of BME nominations being less than the respective local Census population.

Local (or special) Lettings Plans

Local lettings or special lettings plans for designated scheme's to achieve a sustainable community have been implemented in partnership with respective LA's during the last few years. Local lettings plans are currently under discussion for our larger developments at Plough Lane in Merton and at Hayes Station in Hillingdon where housing density is greater than previous schemes.

These plans are not only used for new schemes but for existing areas in partnership with the LA to compliment a neighbourhood centred initiative. Areas of stock may be structurally sound and meet current 'Decent Homes' requirements but compromised due to lack of communal facilities or social circumstances such as crime, drugs or antisocial behaviour. Any plans would be developed with residents the LA and other key stakeholders.

Where we have developed and operated lettings plans there is a review of the plans 12 months from their inception to assess effectiveness. By using this method we can refine plans for subsequent lettings and develop our knowledge base of operational good practice for the future.

Annual Lettings Feedback

Each year feedback on allocations completed within an LA area is provided for our LA partners including analysis of refusals, outcomes from BME analysis and comparators

Annual meetings are held with LA's where we have completed significant development projects and /or with our preferred partner LA's. This is particularly significant where we are seeking to develop localised services .A current example would be the development TVCHA response to the Respect Agenda.

Assessment of Sustainability

An assessment is made of an applicant's potential for sustaining their tenancy and, if there are any support needs, an appropriate care or support plan must be in place. LA's are asked to provide details of any support requirements with nominations to facilitate this assessment.

TVH has appointed specialist Resettlement Co-ordinators to carry out assessments and assist more vulnerable residents to move in and sustain their tenancies. This may involve establishing a support package with a specialist support provider who has access to Supporting People funding.

Eligibility

After consultation with LA partners and in accordance with the Housing Corporation Regulatory Circular 07/04 TVCHA does not have automatic barriers to access into its affordable rented stock. In the following cases we would carry out additional research into the circumstances of households / individuals in conjunction with the LA where:

- They have been evicted for a serious breach of terms of tenancy such as ASB or racial harassment (within 2 years of the eviction date). Consideration will be given where a tenancy has been conducted satisfactorily after this date
- They have been evicted by TVCHA for rent arrears or where it is known that rent arrears are outstanding to another RSL Assessments will be made as to whether the applicant has made reasonable efforts to remedy this and appropriate arrangements for repayment of debts are in place and can be demonstrated.

- Existing care packages cannot be guaranteed at the new address or where there is an acute vulnerability and no history of on going and sustained engagement with support services.
- Older persons accommodation will not be offered where the Housing Director is of the opinion that the needs of the applicant cannot be met by the services available at the scheme.
- Where a potential nominee has misrepresented personal or household circumstances or staff become aware at pre tenancy stages that information pertinent to their housing application has been withheld or is false.

TVCHA in accordance with national Multi Agency Public protection Arrangements (MAPPA) will provide reasonable assistance to LA's by providing appropriate housing for ex –offenders (this includes sex offenders). This is subject to close consultation with LA, police, probation and other necessary agencies to confirm that the applicant would not present a high risk in a particular location and that the necessary care and support plans are in place to safeguard the tenancy and the neighbourhood. Appeals Procedure

Applicants may make an appeal with regard to TVCHA's refusal to accept their nomination from the LA. They should include any additional information they have in support of their appeal. This will be considered by the Head of Housing.

The Head of Housing will investigate the reasonableness of the refusal and will advise the applicant in writing of the decision. This process will be concluded in 14 days unless a mutually agreed alternative timescale is agreed.

If the applicant disputes this decision there is a second right of appeal to the Housing Director. This must be made within 5 days of the initial appeal outcome and will include the reasons for the appeal.

The Housing Director will give a written response based on a review of the initial appeal decision within 14 days. The decision of the Housing Director will be final.

This appeal procedure does not interfere with an individual's right to make a complaint to the Independent Housing Ombudsman.