

The 2010 Housing Allocations Scheme

Proposed changes:

1. Our properties are let using a 'choice based lettings scheme' called **HomeOption**. This means that homeseekers on the Housing Register look at advertisements for vacant properties on the HomeOption website or freesheet every fortnight, then make 'expressions of interest' (bids) using the internet, phone, text or postal coupons. More information as available on our website: www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing

We already provide lots of information to applicants on choice based lettings, but in the revised Allocations Scheme we propose to add more details about HomeOption explaining:

- How vacant properties are advertised
 - How homeseekers can express an interest in vacant properties (bid)
 - What restrictions are in place (for example a homeseeker may have an assessed need for only one type of property)
 - The way we analyse the "bids" and select suitable applicants
 - How we publicise the "bidding" results to homeseekers
 - The information we give homeseekers explaining how the scheme operates
2. The new Allocations Scheme will state that vulnerable homeseekers can contact the Housing Options Team for advice if they are having problems participating in the scheme.
 3. When a homeseeker is being considered for a property through HomeOption, we require up to date evidence of their current circumstances. We usually request this evidence by telephone. It should, under normal circumstances, be provided by homeseekers within the next 24 hours, otherwise they will lose the offer. The aim is to avoid delays in the lettings process.
 4. It is proposed that homeseekers will be penalised if they refuse two offers of suitable accommodation for which they have made "bids" in any three month period. They will become ineligible to express an interest in any property for a period of six months. At the end of the six month period, the homeseeker will be able to participate again and they will keep their former position on the register in accordance with the Allocations Scheme. This is because 184 offers of accommodation were refused in 2009 by homeseekers (even though they "bid" for them) - leaving properties vacant for longer periods and reducing rental income.
 5. We group all those seeking accommodation into 'priority' bands, based on their current situation. Band 1 is the highest priority. Homeseekers in Band 1 with strong medical or welfare grounds and mobility problems will now be given preference for ground floor flats and bungalows, regardless of their waiting time.

6. We have added homeseekers living for some time at Railway Meadow, the new Young Parents Scheme, to Band 1. This is a new scheme in Ongar which will be completed by the end of 2010. Homeseekers who have been in the scheme for at least nine months will be given Band 1 status if they are ready to move on.
7. Homeseekers living in the district for more than a year, immediately prior to application, may now be included in (the higher) Band 4, if they want to be nearer their place of work. This will also apply to homeseekers who have been offered permanent employment or long term (full time) training opportunities which will lead to employment. This change reflects the Government's new guidance, which aims to improve mobility for employment reasons. It may also assist a small number of homeseekers with other assessed housing need to be promoted to Band 3.
8. Homeseekers are currently placed in Band 4 if their household has no access to a garden and includes a child under the age of 15 years. The new Scheme proposes to reduce the age to 11, due to the shortage of accommodation.

Please complete and return our feedback form by Friday 24th September if you want to give us your views, or send an email to:

housinginfo@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

The Government's guidance says we must "engage fully" with the "local community" in developing allocation priorities. We always consult with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, elected councillors, partner housing associations, and other agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. To meet the new conditions we must now consult further with outside agencies such as Social Care, the Probation Service and Health Service - and with all residents, including applicants. All tenants, leaseholders and housing applicants have been sent a copy of "Housing News" with a feedback form enclosed.

You can download Feedback Form, and the full current Allocations Scheme, from the Housing pages of our website: www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing