



Cumbria Choice

Choice Based Lettings

Summary Scheme Guide





Introduction

This document briefly explains the draft Allocations Policy for Cumbria Choice which will be introduced across Cumbria on the expected launch date of December 2010.



Choice based lettings is a method of letting social rented housing (council and housing association properties), which is being introduced across the country. Rather than each council and housing association introducing a choice based scheme individually, the 6 district councils, 7 housing associations and South Lakes Housing Arms Length Management Organisation have agreed to work in partnership to introduce a scheme that covers the whole of Cumbria.

The housing associations are: Accent Housing; Derwent & Solway; Eden Housing; Home; Impact Housing; Riverside; Two Castles.

The main principle of choice based lettings is that properties are advertised so that customers can see which properties are available for letting. Customers are then asked to express an interest (called bidding) in the properties they would like to be considered for. Lettings policies are used to prioritise the customers who bid for the available properties. Most existing letting policies already prioritise people with higher housing need. The difference with choice based lettings is that households will only be considered if they express an interest, or bid, for an advertised property.

As customers can see what properties are available, choice based lettings provides a more transparent way of letting homes, giving customers more say in where they would like to live and more information about available homes. The full Allocations Policy can be found on the web sites of all partner organisations or requested from their offices.

We are currently consulting on the proposed lettings policy as well as how the scheme will operate. We would like to hear from people already on housing registers/waiting lists, existing housing association and council tenants, and other stakeholders to find out their views on the choice based letting scheme. If you would like to make comments about the scheme and/or complete a questionnaire these should be returned by

30th April 2010. The questionnaire can be completed on line at www.homegroup.org.uk/cumbriachoice or requested from the offices of any partner council or housing organisation.

This leaflet explains how the scheme will work and how levels of housing needs are assessed. At the end of the consultation period, all comments and suggestions received will be considered before the allocations policy is completed. The final scheme and lettings policy will then be approved and adopted by all the partner organisations in Cumbria.

This summary sets out:

- Objectives of the lettings policy
- How to apply for housing
- Who is eligible to be accepted onto the housing register
- How priority for housing applicants will be given
- How applications are managed
- How homes will be let
- Other information.

Objectives of the lettings policy

- To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act (1996) as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002).
- To assist applicants in the highest assessed housing need
- To let properties in a fair and transparent way and to give customers feedback on how properties have been let
- To make best use of the existing housing stock
- To ensure that applicants are not discriminated against, whether directly or indirectly
- To support vulnerable applicants and ensure the scheme is accessible to all groups of people
- To provide increased choice to applicants of social rented housing
- To improve mobility across Cumbria
- To promote social inclusion and help achieve sustainable communities.



How to apply for housing

Anyone wanting to bid for housing through the Cumbria Choice scheme will firstly have to complete a housing application form. They will only need to complete one form to register for accommodation with any of the partner landlords who are part of the Cumbria wide scheme. Their application will be assessed and their eligibility to join the register and an assessment of their level of housing need will be based on the information provided. The customer will be informed in writing of the result of their application and, where they have been accepted, the level of priority they have been awarded.

Who is eligible to be accepted onto the housing register?

Anyone can apply to join the Housing Register. However, not everyone will be eligible for housing, for example: those subject to immigration control may not be entitled to access help from the state; those who have committed serious unacceptable behaviour such as anti-social behaviour; serious rent arrears.

Evidence of eligibility will be required at the registration stage. Customers who are eligible to take part in the scheme will not necessarily be let a property as this will depend on their level of priority for housing in comparison to other customers also applying for the same properties.

How will the level of priority be decided?

The registration process will include an assessment of the customer's current housing circumstances. It is the customer's current housing circumstances that will determine the level of priority awarded to their application. An assessment will be made of the customer's circumstances and their application placed into a housing needs band based on that assessment. There are four proposed bands of housing needs:

Band A: Urgent Need

Band B: High Need

Band C: Medium Need

Band D: Adequately Housed

The following are the proposed criteria for each of the bands:

Band A – Urgent Need for Housing

1. Household classed as statutory homeless by a local authority participating in the scheme
2. People suffering domestic violence
3. People suffering severe harassment from neighbours
4. People with an urgent medical need
5. Household that is statutorily overcrowded
6. People living in unsanitary conditions
7. Household whose home is to be demolished or improved as part of a regeneration area.

Band B - High Need for Housing

1. Those who have 2 or more housing needs from Band C (the first two categories in band C indicate one housing need - homelessness)
2. People living in supported housing who are ready to live independently
3. Households under occupying a property (of a partner organisation) by 2 + bedrooms.

Band C – Medium Need for Housing

1. Households accepted as homeless but who have no priority need or are homeless intentionally
2. Households living in private rented accommodation who have a notice to quit confirming the tenancy will end in 8 weeks
3. Care leavers referred by Social Services
4. People suffering harassment
5. Those needing to move to another area e.g. for work or to give/receive support
6. Households that are overcrowded
7. Households in poor or unsuitable accommodation
8. People with a medical need or a social need
9. People under occupying a house (of a partner organisation) by 1 bedroom.

Band D – Low Need for Housing

Households with a low need for housing or who are adequately housed.

Bedroom requirements

When assessing whether a customer is living in overcrowded conditions the following people will be expected to have their own bedroom. Where this is not the case the household will be assessed as overcrowded:

- Couple living together
- A parent in a single parent household
- Person aged 16 years or over
- Child over 7 years who would otherwise have to share with a child of the opposite sex
- Child of the same sex where there is a 10 year age difference
- A further bedroom will be required where 3 children need to share a room.

Local connection criteria

Many properties let through the scheme will also be subject to a local connection condition. The definition of local connection used by the scheme will be as follows:

- A person has been resident in the Local Authority area or specified town/village for at least 6 out of the past 12 months or 3 out of the past 5 years
- A person is at present employed in the district or specified town/village. Confirmation must be obtained from the employer that the person is in employment and that the employment is not of a casual nature
- A person has a close family connection with someone who lives in the Local Authority area or specified town/village. Family connection means: parents, adult children or brothers or sisters who have been resident in the district for a period of at least 5 years
- There are special circumstances which are considered to give rise to a local connection with the Local Authority area or specified town/village.

How applications are managed:

Date of registration

The registration date of an application form will be the date the housing application form is received at the office of any of the partner organisations. If the form is completed over the internet the date the form is received electronically is the date of registration.

Bands and waiting times

The time that people have waited in a particular band will be taken into account when short listing people for a property. The principle is that the longer a customer has been in a housing need band the greater the priority they have. This means the following rules apply to moving between bands:

- Moving up a band - The length of time the customer has waited will be taken from the date that they moved into the higher band
- Moving down a band - Where a customer is moving to a priority band the length of time they have waited will be taken from the date they moved into the band. Where a customer moves out of a priority band into Band D their waiting time will be taken from the date they applied.



How homes are let

Letting of accommodation

The social housing landlords will advertise available property through the Cumbria Choice scheme. The advertising will be carried out on a regular basis and for specific periods of time known as an advertising cycle.

Short listing

After the close of advertising, a shortlist of customers that have bid will be taken from the Cumbria Choice computer system. The shortlist will identify the order of customers based on highest housing need, longest time in the band and local connection.

Formal offer of a property

Once the customer has confirmed that they want to accept the offer of the tenancy, the landlord of the property will give the applicant a formal offer of the tenancy in writing.

Direct lets

Most properties will be advertised through the Cumbria Choice scheme. However in certain circumstances a housing organisation may allocate a property directly to an applicant. For example this may be where an applicant is unable to leave hospital until they can be offered a suitably adapted property. Where an applicant is identified as requiring a direct let the case will be referred to a senior officer for approval.

Reviews and complaints

Customers have the right to ask for a review regarding certain decisions made about their application. The review and complaints procedures are explained in more detail in the full Allocations Policy document.

Further information

If you want to find out more about choice based lettings, or the lettings policy, you can do so by viewing the full document on the websites of partner organisations: the 6 district authorities and 8 social housing providers. You can contact any of the partner organisations by calling in person, in writing or by phone and they will provide you with a copy of the full policy document Alternatively, please visit www.homegroup.org.uk/cumbriachoice.

This leaflet can be made available in large print and other languages on request.