

Sunderland Council Housing Service

Lettings Policy

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Welcome to Sunderland Council Housing Service Lettings Policy.

We hope you will find it clear, helpful and informative. This is a live document and will be kept under review in order to reflect changes locally or within Government Policy.

Public services have seen significant changes over the last few years, many of which have affected how we provide our services and no doubt we will have many more challenges ahead of us.

In 2012 the Localism Act came into force, giving Local Authorities greater freedom to better manage their waiting lists. Since then we have had some fundamental changes in national legislation, in particular the changes brought about by welfare reform. Many of these changes have resulted in housing becoming less affordable for specific groups of people, and therefore we need to respond appropriately to support those in housing need.

In addition, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed greater obligations on Local Authorities to support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as early as possible. By becoming a Registered Provider we will help to prevent homelessness by taking a thorough and robust approach to offering housing options.

This policy has been written in order to support residents in a sustainable way to meet the housing and support needs of households as effectively as we possibly can. Our aim is to make the best use of our housing stock for those in housing need in order to benefit the whole City.

Social housing is a limited resource and therefore it is vital to strike a balance between creating sustainable communities and supporting those in greatest need of accommodation.

The demand for our properties is high and this policy will enable us to ensure that those who are in the greatest housing need are given priority for suitable housing which will best address their situation.

1. Definitions

Definition of key terms

application date

Your application date is the date we receive your completed application form.

bands

These are categories of housing need that make up the system we use to show the level of priority that applicants have on our housing register.

Common Travel Area

This area is made up of the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.

housing register

Our housing register is a list of everyone seeking housing with Sunderland City Council

letting policy

Our rules as to how properties will be advertised and let. This is our letting policy.

direct offer

In some circumstances we may offer a property to an applicant without requiring a bid – this is called a direct offer or a direct let.

Housing Options Team

This team offers advice and help on housing options and homelessness, and aims to prevent homelessness.

local authority

For our scheme, the local government authority is Sunderland City Council.

local letting policy

This is a policy that takes account of local circumstances.

affordable home ownership

This is a scheme to enable homeseekers who cannot afford to buy a property on the open market to get onto the property ladder by part- renting and part-buying, usually with a registered provider.

nomination agreement

This kind of agreement says how the local authority and registered providers must co-operate and work in partnership to help people in housing need and to prevent homelessness.

priority date

This is the date when a person is given additional priority, which will be later than their application date.

reasonable preference

The Housing Act uses this phrase to describe the kind of priority a local council should give to certain types of housing need.

registered providers

These are social landlords registered with the Homes and Communities Agency to provide social housing. Sunderland Council Housing Service is a registered provider.

tie-breaker

We use a tie-breaker to decide which of 2 applications with equal priority will get our offer of a property^[PW1].

we, Sunderland Council Housing Service

This means Sunderland Council Housing Service, the registered provider within Sunderland City Council

you, the applicant

This means a person applying or wishing to apply for housing with Sunderland Council Housing Service

1. Introduction

What is the letting policy for?

This document sets out Sunderland Council Housing Service lettings policy. This means it is a lettings policy for Sunderland Council Housing Service, the Registered Provider within Sunderland City Council.

The policy sets out Sunderland Council Housing Service's approach to letting properties to those who are eligible and qualify to join our Housing Register.

Equalities statement

We are committed to including equality in everything we do. This includes eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and access, and valuing diversity in delivering our services and in our employment practices.

When making decisions about employing staff, we will consider equality and diversity. We will also consider the broader impact of access to employment on community cohesion and social inclusion.

The policy's aims and objectives

Our aims and objectives are:

- to provide a housing letting system which is easily understood and accessible to all
- to increase mobility across all tenures, for example through tenancy exchanges
- to provide housing options including advice, along with access to registered providers'
- to ensure a more effective use of housing across the City
- to increase the overall supply of properties and therefore help the local authority to meet its strategic housing function and statutory homelessness duties
- to help prevent homelessness by operating a housing register and by taking a thorough and robust approach to offering housing options
- to help people in hardship and vulnerable people, including older people and those with a disability requiring additional support
- to build effective partnerships across all the region's housing sectors – statutory, voluntary and private
- to build community cohesion.

2. Legal context of the policy

Reasonable preference

The law says we must give reasonable preference to 5 groups of applicants:

- People who are homeless within the meaning of Part VII (7) of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.
- People who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2), or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985 or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3)).
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.

- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the authority's district, where failure to meet the need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

Additional preference

Section 166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996 gives housing authorities the power to create an allocation scheme that gives higher priority to particular kinds of people who fall within the statutory reasonable preference categories and who have urgent housing needs.

Our letting policy allows us to give higher priority to:

- applicants who are severely overcrowded, and
- applicants who need to move for urgent medical reasons.

We'll give an even higher priority to applicants in these 2 groups if they have a prescribed connection to the armed forces. This connection can be through any of the following 3 categories:

- Applicants discharged from the regular UK armed forces within the previous 5 years and who have served 3 years or more or been medically discharged (except people dishonourably discharged).
- Current members of the UK armed forces, and current or former (previous 5 years) reserve forces, who have suffered an injury in service that makes their current home unsuitable.
- Widows, widowers or civil partners of UK armed forces members killed during service and needing to leave armed forces accommodation.

Our policy ensures that we award priority to applicants in these preference groups.

3. Applying for a house

How to apply and who to contact

An applicant can register alone, jointly with a partner or with another adult who wishes to live with them, including family members. Copies of the Housing Register application form can be requested by phoning the customer services network on 0191 5205551 or from our web site www.sunderland.gov.uk at Housing Register Find a Home

Applications to the Council can be made in the following ways:

- completing a paper application form and sending it by post;
- completing an application form in person at one of the Council's Customer Service Centres, where assistance may be provided; and
- contacting the customer services network on 0191 5205551.

Applicants will need to provide information about:

- themselves and those they wish to share a home with;
- their housing history;
- their housing needs;
- any support needs;
- their financial circumstances; and
- their areas of choice.

We will:

- Register an application within 10 working days of receiving it once all information has been received and verified.

Where an applicant has a housing register application and then makes a homelessness application, the housing application will be reassessed once the homelessness application has been determined.

For more information click on the following link [Homeless Service](#) or go to www.sunderland.gov.uk (Housing). You can also refer to the overall Allocations Policy for Sunderland City Council for the processes followed by our Housing Options Team.

Who can apply?

We will consider applications from people aged 16 years and over who send us a fully completed Housing Register application form.

The Housing Register will be used as our core data to draw applicants for new Sunderland Council Housing Service homes.

Each case will be assessed considering the needs and vulnerabilities of the applicant, the nature, location and size of the property on offer and wider community cohesion considerations in relationship to maintaining sustainable and balanced communities.

Applicants for housing who are Sunderland City Council employees or Elected Members or their families must declare their interest when applying.

Such applications will be assessed in the normal way but offers of accommodation will not be made without the prior approval of the Council's Senior Housing Manager. If the applicant is related to the Senior Housing Manager, offers of accommodation will not be made without the prior approval of the Head of Commissioning.

Who is eligible for social housing?

Anyone over 16 who needs help to find affordable housing in City of Sunderland can apply to join our register. There are some exceptions, as follows.

People are eligible only if they meet the requirements of section 160ZA of the Housing Act 1996 (and any subsequent legislation), which sets out the immigration status of people who have come to the United Kingdom from abroad.

We cannot allow people from the following groups to join our housing register:

- People subject to immigration control unless they have refugee status; or they have exceptional or indefinite leave to remain; or they are the subject of a sponsorship undertaking, have been in the UK over 5 years and the sponsor has died.
- Some EEA nationals that are not eligible for social housing.
- Anyone not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area unless they are exempt.

EU nationals required to leave the UK by the UK government are also ineligible.

The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 also state who we can help.

An allocation from the local authority housing register is exempt from the Right to Rent legislation introduced by central government in 2016. Eligibility for social housing through Sunderland City Council is checked and verified in line with section 160ZA of the Housing Act 1996, as described above. This means our applicants are not disadvantaged by the fact that the Right to Rent legislation does not apply to them.

Who qualifies to join Sunderland City Council's Housing register?

Everyone who is eligible for social housing will qualify to join Sunderland City Council's housing register however some applicants (or households) will be unable to access housing with Sunderland Council Housing Service as registered provider. The Localism Act 2011 (s.160ZA (6) and (7)) enables us to disqualify certain groups from Sunderland Council Housing Service.

Confidentiality statement

In order to allocate social housing effectively the Council needs to collect and use confidential and personal data. When doing so we will comply with General Data Protection Regulation and will treat sensitive data fairly and lawfully. In certain circumstances we may share sensitive data with other organisations such as landlords and the police but we will only do this with the appropriate consent of the applicant or in circumstances where the law allows us to do this, such as the prevention and detection of fraud or any other crime.

Details of the Council's privacy policy can be found on our web site.

4. How we assess need

Banding details

We have to ensure we meet the legal requirements of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) and the Communities and Local Government Allocation of

Accommodation: To do this, we place applicants into one of our scheme's bands according to their assessed housing need.

The 4 bands are 1, 2, 3 and 1 plus.

Appendix 1 summarises the bands and the criteria of housing need required for each.

The Scheme applies bandings which are based upon each applicant's assessed needs. These needs will be assessed by different people depending upon what the needs are. E.g. Occupational Therapists will assess the needs of an applicant with a physical disability or medical need, the police will assess whether someone was experiencing severe harassment.

The bands distinguish between applicants who have an urgent need to move, those with a recognised priority need, those who wish to move out of choice and those who need to move from an area that is being developed or renewed by the Council or other partners within the City.

Banding may be reviewed at any time and may be varied upwards or downwards depending on changes in circumstance.

Sunderland Council Housing Service have a target of allocating 33% of available properties to applicants in Band 1 and Band 1 plus, 33% in Band 2 and the remaining 33% in Band 3. This is to ensure fair and transparent allocation of available properties [across](#) the City.

An applicant must contact the Council if their circumstances change (see change of circumstances for further details).

The bandings applied are as follows:

Band 1 – Urgent Housing Need

This section is for cases of urgent housing need as set out below.

Unable to Cope due to Medical or Disability Reasons

To qualify for Band 1 based on medical needs or disability grounds an applicant (or member of their household) will have a chronic/degenerative illness or impairment (which may be physical, mental, learning or sensory) which has resulted in them being no longer able to cope in their present home.

In making an assessment about whether an applicant qualifies, an Occupational Therapist may consider the impact the applicant's home has on their ability to access essential facilities and whether the existing home can be adapted to meet their needs.

A written recommendation will be required from a health professional(s) to confirm that an urgent move is necessary to resolve the current difficulties and that the current home cannot be adapted to meet the medical needs. The information should be provided by a clinical Consultant or an Occupational Therapist but other evidence from health professionals may be also considered.

Experiencing Severe Harassment

To qualify for Band 1 based on severe harassment, an applicant will either be a victim of serious anti-social behaviour (ASB) or harassment that the Council, partner landlord, the Police or other agencies cannot resolve.

Harassment will include actual violence, serious threats of violence, hate crime motivated by prejudice or intimidation significant enough to be deemed unreasonable for the applicant to remain in their home. This banding will only be awarded to assist an applicant to move from the locality of the ASB or harassment, and be rehoused to an area that is a sufficient distance to avoid a re-occurrence of the problem.

Written evidence and supporting documentation will be required from a senior officer of the Police to confirm this.

Immediate Risk of Domestic Abuse

To qualify for Band 1 based on domestic abuse, an applicant will need immediate rehousing because they have been categorised as at a high risk of domestic abuse, for example via a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or by partner landlords. Also, applicants who are experiencing domestic abuse will be assessed via the Council's Housing Options Team under the homeless legislation as prescribed in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), see below.

Homelessness

Homelessness is an issue that the Council has a statutory (legal) duty to investigate and assess. The Council's Housing Options Team will assess all potentially homeless applications.

Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 requires local Housing Allocation Schemes to give reasonable preference to specific groups of households on the register which includes homeless households. The Council now has a wider statutory duty to prevent and relieve homelessness in its area with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) in 2018. This means that preference needs to be given to all applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

At the heart of the legislation there are two new duties:

a Preventative Duty which requires councils to assist anybody who is threatened with losing their homes in the next 56 days; and

a Relief Duty to assist, for a period of 56 days, anybody who is already homeless and without a home, to find one.

To qualify for Band 1 based on homelessness, an applicant will need to have had their circumstances assessed and have received confirmation in writing from the Council's Housing Options Team that they have either been accepted under the Relief Duty and are likely to be owed a Main Housing Duty as having a priority need or have been assessed as statutorily homeless and that they are owed a duty under section 193(2) or 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996.

An applicant is likely to be statutorily homeless if they are:

- homeless; **and**
- eligible for housing assistance; **and**

- not intentionally homeless; **and**
- in priority need.

Further details can be found in the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) [Homelessness Code of Guidance](#) which can be found on the MHCLG website

Results of an applicant's homelessness assessment will be communicated to them within 10 days.

Unsatisfactory and Unfit Property

To qualify for Band 1 based on unfit property, a household must be assessed by the Council's Environmental Health services as living in insanitary or unsatisfactory housing. The assessment will include the number and type of "category 1" hazards (as defined and assessed under the Housing Act 2004 and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005); the time of year, the person living there and the length of time to satisfactorily resolve the problem. These will be assessed on a case by case basis. This will include an inspection of your property by Council officers.

Statutory Overcrowding

To qualify for Band 1 based on statutory overcrowding, a household must come within the current statutory (legal) standards on overcrowding, contained in the Housing Act 1985 [Statutory Overcrowding](#) or through the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005 in relation to crowding and space.

An applicant will have had their circumstances assessed by the Council's Environmental Health services and will have received confirmation in writing that they have been accepted as statutorily overcrowded or overcrowded through the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System. An assessment for statutory overcrowding will consider the number of rooms and space in the rooms within the current property. This may include an inspection of the property by Council officers and evidence of the people who are living there.

Verification or production of evidence will be required to be awarded Urgent Housing Need Band One

Band 2 - Priority Housing Need

This section is for cases of priority housing need as set out below:

Medical or Disability Reasons which can be Improved by Re-housing

To qualify for Band 2 based on medical reasons an applicant or member of their family will have a chronic/degenerative illness or impairment (which may be physical, mental, learning or sensory) which could be eased or improved by rehousing.

Written verification or written evidence will be required from a clinical consultant, Occupational Therapist and/or health professionals confirming your medical conditions.

Welfare need

To qualify for Band 2 based on a welfare need, an applicant will have been assessed by the Council, Sunderland Care and Support or Together for Children as having a social need. For example, this could be someone leaving care or another vulnerable person who needs a secure base from which

to build a stable life and who could not be expected to find their own accommodation. Evidence will be required of the welfare need.

To receive or give care and support

This is intended to reduce the need for formal care services and allow the care recipient to receive support from their immediate family to remain in their own home environment rather than moving into residential care. To qualify for Band 2, an applicant will need to either give or receive full-time care, assistance or monitoring due to chronic health problems, physical disabilities, dementia, or terminal illness. This will be assessed by the Council.

The criteria for this category are:

- the person requiring the care must have a critical support need that cannot be met by the person themselves and is essential for maintaining their health and well-being; **and**
- the need cannot be met by local carers or support networks without moving home; **and**
- the need can be met by the care recipient, or care giver being moved nearer to their support network; **and**
- the care giver will be eligible to receive carers allowance; **and**
- the move must be to a different location which is beyond reasonable travelling distance; **and**
- where failure to meet that need will cause hardship to themselves or others.

To avoid hardship

To qualify for Band 2 based on avoiding hardship, an applicant will have been assessed by the Council as having a need to move to a particular locality. For example, to take up education, employment or training or to access specialist medical treatment, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship. Evidence from professional workers will be required to support the assessment.

Homelessness/risk of homelessness

Any applicant who is homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act or who is owed a duty under section 189B (relief duty owed to all eligible persons who are homeless), section 190(2) (duty to applicants who are intentionally homeless but with priority need), section 193(2) (main housing duty to applicants who are unintentionally homeless with priority need) or section 195(2) (prevention duty in the case of threatened homelessness) or who is occupying accommodation that was provided under section 192(3) will qualify for Band 2 if they do not meet the requirements for Band 1.

This will be assessed by the Council's Housing Options Team.

To take up a key worker employment opportunity

To qualify for Band 2 based on an employment opportunity an applicant will have received an offer of key worker employment within the city. The applicant will need to move into Sunderland to take up the offer of work. Key workers are defined as those people who provide essential services necessary for the economic growth of Sunderland and those who fill skill shortages within the city. Acceptance into this Band will be subject to the provision of appropriate written evidence/proof from the employer and the relevant affordability and financial checks.

Moving on from Supported Accommodation

To qualify for Band 2 under this category, an applicant will be living in supported or temporary accommodation, will have successfully engaged in and completed a programme of support and be

ready to move on to independent living. An assessment will be completed and evidence will be required from the organisation that has provided the support including personal plans.

Overcrowding in a social tenancy

The bedroom standard is an appropriate measure of overcrowding for allocation purposes.

The bedroom standard allocates a separate bedroom to each:

- married or co-habiting couple;
- adult aged 21 years or more;
- pair of adolescents aged 10 – 20 years of the same sex; and
- pair of children aged under 10 regardless of sex.

To qualify for banding based on overcrowding, an applicant must be a current tenant and they will have been assessed in the following way:

- The assessment will be based on the number of bed spaces that are needed. Every person within a household needs one bed space, a double room counts as two bed spaces and a single as one bed space.
- If a room will fit a double bed and wardrobe, even if there is very little space left, this is classed as a double bedroom. A room that cannot physically accommodate this amount of furniture will be classed as a single room.
- We will only count people in households who live there on a permanent basis and have been there for more than six months.

If, after assessment, an applicant is short by two or more bed spaces then they will be accepted for assistance in the Priority banding.

We would expect that household members make the best use of space and rooms i.e. single parent in a single room. Evidence of household members and the number of bedrooms will be required. This may include an inspection of the property by Council officers.

Under occupancy in a social tenancy

To qualify for Band 2 based on under occupancy, an applicant will be a current social landlord tenant and be living in a property which is too big. If there are two or more spare bedrooms then it is possible that an applicant could be placed in Band 2. However, an assessment will be carried out by the social landlord and the Council and acceptance into this Band will depend upon the applicant's current property and area in which the property is located. Social Landlords will consider under occupancy for tenants as this will free up larger properties which will be allocated to someone else thus making best use of the available stock.

Children in Upper Storey Flats

To qualify for Band 2 within this group, based on having children in an upper flat, an applicant will be a current tenant and will have a child(ren) under the age of 16 years living in an upper flat of two or more storeys. This does not include maisonettes and S257 Houses in Multiple Occupation (buildings converted without Building Regulation approval). In addition, by moving an existing tenant to another more suitable property, a vacancy will be created which will be allocated to someone else

thus making best use of the available stock. For a woman who is pregnant, proof of pregnancy will be required from the MATB1 that is received from the midwife or doctor after 21 weeks pregnancy.

Other landlords and partners may have their own policies in place.

Care Leavers at risk of homelessness.

To qualify for Band 2 based on being a care leaver the following criteria would be required: the applicant leaving care should be within 3 months of their 16th birthday (or 3 months after they become looked after if this occurs after their 16th birthday); evidence must be provided from Together for Children to verify the young person has Care Leaver Status; Together for Children must also provide an assessment of their housing and support need such as a pathway Plan or relevant risk assessment; and consent must be gained from the care Leaver to share information.

Verification or evidence will be required to be awarded Band Two Priority Housing Need.

Band 3 - Choice

This group is for all applicants without an urgent or priority need to move who would like to move out of choice.

Band 1 Plus - Area Renewal

Where an applicant is living in a designated renewal area and their property is earmarked for demolition, they will be given additional priority for a 12 week period. The Council will assess and determine which properties are affected.

Reviewing Banding Status

An applicant's banding status will be reviewed by the Council to assess whether circumstances have changed and to ensure an applicant is actively engaging in the process and to find out whether they require any support to do so. The minimum frequencies within which reviews will be carried out are detailed below:

Band 1 - Urgent Housing Need

Priority is given for 12 weeks and a review will be carried out at the end of this period. Applicants will be contacted by the Council during the 12 week period to see if they require any support and whether there are any issues with bidding. However if applicants within this category due to 'Homelessness' do not engage appropriately in seeking, bidding and securing properties, they may be made a single final offer of a suitable property.

For all others in this category, if they refuse 3 suitable offers, priority status for housing may be removed and the application will be placed into the choice category at Band 3.

Applicants have a right to request a review of the decision (see Section 10).

Band 2 - Priority Housing Need

Priority is given for 12 weeks and a review will be carried out at the end of this period. Applicants in the 'Other homelessness' category who do not engage appropriately, in seeking, bidding and securing properties, despite being offered support may be made a single final offer of a suitable property.

Applicants have a right to request a review of all decisions (see Section 10).

If the applicant refuses 3 offers which are deemed to be reasonable after reviewing suitability, priority status for housing may be removed and the application will be placed into Band 3 General Housing Need (Choice). Applicants have a right to request a review of the decision.

Band 3 - Choice

A review will be carried out annually by the Council to see if the applicant wishes to remain on the housing register.

Band 1 Plus – Area Renewal

A review will be carried out at the end of the 12 week additional priority period with the applicant and the Council's Housing Team in relation to housing need, the availability of housing and area renewal plans and timescales.

Change of circumstances

Applicants must inform us of any change in their household circumstances that may affect their banding, the type of property they need, or their need for extra advice or support on housing options.

Such a change could include:

- change of address
- a member of the household no longer wishing to be included on the application.
- extra member(s) of the household, such as a new baby
- relationship breakdown
- a new physical or mental health problem or disability that affects housing need
- worsening or improvement of an existing physical or mental health problem or disability that affects housing need
- a change to their financial circumstances.

Applicants must provide this information in writing, which could be on a change of circumstances form or by contacting Sunderland Council Housing Service by email

If a change of circumstances means a change in band and we give the application higher priority, this will apply from the date we are notified of this change. This is called the 'priority date'. If we give the application a lower priority, the original application date will remain.

We may withdraw an offer of a property if we find that an applicant's circumstances have changed and this would have resulted in them having a lower priority, being unable to afford the property (including any benefit sanctions) and/or being disqualified. We will assess the applicant's new circumstances, award new banding (if applicable), and notify them in writing.

5. Our rules on property entitlement

Property type and size

To ensure good management of the housing stock, we will allocate certain properties only to people who meet certain criteria. For example, a 3-bedroom house will be automatically available to households in higher-income work (as well as all families who can fully occupy it) but may be available to others depending on the circumstances.

Local lettings policy

In some cases we may introduce a Local Lettings Policy (LLP) to ensure good management of stock or where a planning agreement (section 106) is needed for new build properties. For example:

- Areas where housing is in short supply
- To ensure balanced communities and prevent anti-social behaviour
- To consider rural or city centre related issues with regard to demand and affordability

LLPs will be reviewed annually to ensure they are still appropriate.

Local lettings policy 1

PROPERTIES COVERED BY THE POLICY

All properties let by Sunderland Council Housing Service in the Hendon area.

CRITERIA

Properties within the specified area will be let in line with the following criteria:-

When an applicant or member of the applicant's household (who is to be rehoused with the applicant is;

Currently resident in the area or; has left the area within the last 6 months and has lived for a continuous period of 12 months prior to either their date of application; or the date that they left the area

And/or

Currently resident outside of the area who supports or requires support from someone who has been resident in the area for at least 2 years

In continuous full or part time work in the area for at least 12 months prior to the date of application. Part time work means a minimum of 2 full days per week.

Local Lettings Policy 2

PROPERTIES COVERED BY THE POLICY

All properties let by Sunderland Council Housing Service in the Hetton le Hole area.

CRITERIA

Properties within the specified area will be let in line with the following criteria:-

When an applicant or member of the applicant's household (who is to be rehoused with the applicant is;

Currently resident in the area or; has left the area within the last 6 months and has lived for a continuous period of 12 months prior to either their date of application; or the date that they left the area

And/or

Currently resident outside of the area who supports or requires support from someone who has been resident in the area for at least 2 years

In continuous full or part time work in the area for at least 12 months prior to the date of application.

Part time work means a minimum of 2 full days per week.

Local Lettings Policy 3

PROPERTIES COVERED BY THE POLICY

All new build bungalows let by Sunderland Council Housing Service as detailed below:

17 bungalows in Cork Street, Hendon
4 bungalows in Albert Place, Washington
5 bungalows in Boulton Terrace, Shiney Row
5 bungalows Elmwood Avenue, Southwick
11 bungalows Old Mill Road, Southwick

CRITERIA

Properties within the specified area will be let in line with the following criteria:-

Applicants will be ineligible for housing in this area if they are a homeowner who already owns a residential property in the UK or abroad or part own a property under Shared Ownership Scheme. This includes applicants who own a property but have chosen to rent it out.

Applicants will be subject to additional scoring criteria for the specified properties in addition to the existing banding to ensure properties are allocated to those in the greatest need.

Home Ownership

Homeowners are not usually eligible for housing, however in exceptional circumstances and at our discretion. Homeowners may qualify. Further details on homeowners can be found in the 'key definitions' section of this policy and our accompanying resources.

We carry out affordability assessments to help protect our income and assets. encourage tenancy sustainability, and to ensure we are not putting customers at risk of financial hardship. We reserve the right to only accept applicants for properties which meet requirements.

All applicants will receive a written decision of the outcome of their application. including the reason and criteria we use for excluding and rejecting applicants.

Applicants are ineligible for housing if they are a homeowner who already owns a residential property in the UK or abroad or part own a property under Shared Ownership Scheme. This includes applicants who own a property but have chosen to rent it out. Applicants who own a residential caravan, mobile home or houseboat may also be considered homeowners (England only). In exceptional circumstances and at our discretion homeowners may qualify, however the relevant evidence will be required.

Prior to any offer of accommodation being confirmed. we must carry out an affordability check to confirm the applicant can afford and sustain the tenancy in question.

6. How we offer properties

Giving higher priority to people with a local connection

We comply with government guidance that aims to ensure people with a long-standing connection to their local community get higher priority for council homes.

The guidance says those with a well-established residency history, relatives or a job in the local area should benefit first when social homes become available. This is called a 'local connection'.

Will this affect me when I apply?

No. When you apply to us for housing, we will not consider 'local connection' when assessing your housing need or putting you in a housing band.

Will this affect me if I am shortlisted for an offer of a property?

Yes, it may do. When we draw up a shortlist for offering a property, we will give a higher priority to you regardless of your banding if:

- 1) you have lived in City of Sunderland or the wider north-east region – Darlington, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Redcar and Cleveland, South Tyneside, Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham – for a period of one year before the offer date, or
- 2) you have not lived in the north-east region for a period of one year before the offer date but you still have a local connection to Sunderland (only) because:
 - you have close family (siblings, parents, grandparents, or children) who have lived in Sunderland for one year before the offer date, or
 - you need to move to the area to receive support from or give support to an extended family member (cousin, nephew, niece, aunt, uncle) who has lived in for one year before the offer date, or
 - you or a member of your household are currently employed (if part-time, then at least 2 days a week) on a permanent contract in County Durham.

However, a local connection will not give you a higher priority on the shortlist than the following people:

- Applicants with an armed forces connection (Armed forces and reserve forces connection).
- Applicants who need to move away from another area to escape violence or harm.
- Statutorily homeless applicants or care leavers.
- Applicants from outside Sunderland who wish to move into the area to take up an offer of employment (if part-time, at least 2 days a week) on a permanent contract.

Our freedom to deal with individual cases in exceptional circumstances

The guidance says we are free to deal with individual cases as we see fit if there are exceptional circumstances, including hard-to-let housing.

So if a property has been hard to let and we have already advertised it at least once, we may let it directly to an interested applicant to avoid the further cost of keeping the property empty. This applicant need not have lived in the north-east region for one year or have a local connection to Sunderland.

Advertising

We will advertise all available properties through Sunderland Council Housing Service's webpage however offers for properties will only be made to those applicants who are active on the Sunderland City Council Housing Register.

In the event a property is classed as difficult to let and has not been taken despite three attempts to let the property it will be advertised as "Available Immediately" and a direct let made to an interested applicant outside of the usual "nomination process" as per guidance.

Shortlisting and tie-breakers

When a property is made available the Council will firstly consider applications which match the property type from those who are in Band 1 (urgent housing need) or Band 1 Plus.

If there is more than one applicant who matches the property in these bandings, any additional preferences and the date of registration will be taken into account.

If there are no suitable applicants in these bands, those who have been accepted as having a Band 2 priority housing need will then be identified.

As above, where more than one applicant is suitable any additional preferences and the date of registration will be taken into account. Should there be no suitable applications again, then those who have been identified as having a general housing need will be matched using the date of registration to determine which applicant is nominated to the tenancy.

If a local letting policy applies to the property, shortlisting will depend on its specific criteria.

Making an offer

We will contact the successful applicant and give them details of the offer. At this point, we will verify the applicant's circumstances in line with this policy to ensure they have not materially changed.

If we find there has been a change that would have caused a move to a lower band (or disqualification from the scheme), we will withdraw the offer and review their application.

If the applicant cannot afford the tenancy being offered, we may withdraw the offer.

We may also withdraw an offer if the applicant has behaved in an unacceptable way, which may include behaviour under investigation that could lead to possible eviction from their current tenancy (see Exclusions for further details around this).

Feedback

To ensure all our lettings are open and transparent, we publish feedback on the number of lets, the banding of successful applicants, and their date of application/priority date. This enables applicants to assess their likely chances of success and help them make realistic decisions on their housing options.

Direct offers

In exceptional cases we may offer a property directly to an applicant, there will be times there will be a need for the Housing Services Manager to intervene normal allocation review processes and respond to emergency situations that may result in providing a direct let property.

These situations include things such as a fire, flood, domestic abuse or that the tenant would be at risk of serious harm to remain in their current home. There is no limit to this list.

All property offers in emergency situations are to be proposed by the Housing Services Manager. The Senior Housing Manager would review and sign off all offers of property in these emergency situations.

The Direct Lettings categories

There are a range of areas where a Direct Let would be an appropriate approach to take to ensure the best use of stock and meet local needs

- **Adapted properties**
Lets to already adapted properties are made outside the bidding system in the first instance to make best use of our stock and make sure that the applicants offered the properties need the adaptations in them.
- **Left in Occupation of a council property**
In certain cases where a person is left in occupation of a Council property at the end of a secure or introductory tenancy.
Lets made under this category are outside of the allocation scheme in terms of meeting the requirements of the reasonable preference categories.
- **Transfer to lower demand Council property**
When a Council tenant wishes to transfer to a property that there is significantly lower demand for than their current property.
Lets made under this category are outside of the allocation scheme in terms of meeting the requirements of the reasonable preference categories.
- **Witness protection**
When a witness to a major crime needs to be relocated to Sunderland for their safety (upon the request of the Police).
- **High risk domestic violence**
In some urgent cases there is a high risk of further abuse to the survivor of Domestic Abuse and may need alternative accommodation.
It may be that the Council makes provision of property and support for the perpetrator of Domestic Abuse to allow for the survivor to remain in their home.
- **High risk hate crime**
In some serious cases of hate crime, it may be appropriate to re-house an applicant quickly via a direct let where there is a serious risk to a person and their family.
- **Serious nuisance (high risk)**
In exceptionally urgent cases of nuisance where there is a risk of death or serious harm to the victim and their family.

- Life limiting illness

When an applicant has a life limiting illness and their current home is not suitable for their needs, it may be necessary to re-house them quickly into a home that is suitable.

- Prevention of sexual, physical or emotional abuse or harm

In exceptionally urgent cases where there is a high risk to the customer and/or their family of serious sexual, physical or emotional abuse or harm if they do not move away from their current property.

- Multi-agency public protection (MAPPA) cases

MAPPA colleagues may decide that certain previous offenders need to be re-housed in a managed way in order that the risk to their previous victims and/or the public and the risk of re-offending is minimised.

Lets made under this category are outside of the allocation scheme in terms of meeting the requirements of the reasonable preference categories.

- Fostering of children

In exceptional circumstances where the customer is a foster carer for children, where the care must continue and moving to an alternative property is the only option to enable this.

- Downsizing

This enables Council tenants who are under-occupying their home to move to a smaller Council property.

- Hospital discharge

When a vulnerable customer is to be discharged from hospital who has nowhere suitable available to stay upon their discharge AND hostel accommodation is not suitable.

- Homeless

Applicants that are homeless and in priority need can be made a direct offer of accommodation

- Similar alternative property

When an applicant has been offered a property and it is subsequently discovered that it will not be available to occupy within a reasonable timeframe, or even at all (for example if major works are discovered to be required after the property was advertised) they can be awarded the next property of that type in the area that becomes available.

- Creation of new tenancy upon a request from an existing sole tenant under the Council's discretionary policy

The Council operates a policy under which a sole tenant may request a joint tenancy with an existing member of their household who is either their spouse or civil partner or any other person who has lived with them for a minimum period of 12 months prior to a request being made.

This is subject to the sole tenancy being conducted satisfactorily, there being no legal reason why a joint tenancy cannot be granted (e.g. eligibility) and approval by management.

Lets made under this category are outside of the allocation scheme in terms of meeting the requirements of the reasonable preference categories.

- Private sector house renovation

When a person affected by private sector improvements requires an offer of temporary accommodation to enable works to be carried out because there is nowhere else they can stay.

- Armed Forces

When a person serving/or has served in the regular/reserve forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness, mental illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's service.

When a person who has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of that person's spouse or civil partner who has served in the regular forces and whose death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that person's service.

- Direct Let 'Other'

In other exceptionally urgent cases where an applicant needs to be re-housed

- First come, first served properties

Where a property has been not been taken up despite three attempts to let the property. The property will be allocated on a first come, first served basis to the first applicant to contact the Council who meets the eligibility criteria for that property.

Lets made under this category are outside of the allocation scheme in terms of meeting the requirements of the reasonable preference categories.

Refusal of offers

A suitable offer is an offer of a property that meets the applicant's assessed needs within this policy.

If an applicant refuses 3 suitable offers within a 12-month rolling period, we will suspend their application for 28 days to allow them to appeal against removal from the register. If they appeal unsuccessfully or do not appeal, we will remove them from the register for 6 months. This means they will be unable to access Sunderland Council Housing Service properties unless their circumstances change materially, in which case they can reapply.

We regard the failure to respond to a suitable offer as a refusal, we will allow 5 working days for a response to an offer before it is determined as failure to respond and therefore refusal.

We, Sunderland Council Housing Service will decide whether the refusal is reasonable. For direct lets, we will decide on suitable action case by case.

If a homeless applicant refuses a suitable offer, we will have fulfilled our duty to house them and they will lose their priority. For these applicants, Sunderland City Council Housing Options Team will decide whether the offer was suitable. We will reassess the applicant and place them in the appropriate band but without any further statutory duty to house them. The applicant will have a right to have the decision reviewed under section 202 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

Adapted properties

Some properties have been specially adapted to benefit disabled people. Examples include ramps, stair lifts, through-floor lifts, walk-in showers and adapted kitchens.

We will let adapted properties to ensure we re-house the most suitable applicant. They will be let to the applicant with the highest and most suitably matched needs according to the medical framework. In these cases, we may need to take advice from an occupational therapist or other suitable medical specialist.

To meet *severe medical need* and make the best use of our housing stock, we may make a direct let of a heavily adapted property.

Mutual exchanges

Requests for a mutual exchange can be considered from tenants who have a secure tenancy or an assured tenant who satisfies the conditions in s92(2A) Housing Act 1985. We cannot permit exchanges with tenants of private landlords. The other tenant must have written consent from his landlord.

We will only refuse consent on the same grounds as are available for secure tenants and outlined in Schedule 3 of the Housing Act 1985.

Where the tenant is in breach of their tenancy (including any rent arrears) we can impose a condition requiring the breach to be corrected. If a condition is imposed, the exchange cannot take place until the breach has been remedied.

We will give or refuse consent in writing within 42 days of the application to exchange being received.

Succession

The Localism Act reduces the automatic statutory rights of succession for all new secure tenancies from April 2012. There is now only a statutory right of succession to a spouse or partner. There is no statutory right of succession for other family members.

These changes do not affect tenancies that began before 1st April 2012.

Where there is no statutory right of succession, the Council may exercise discretion to offer the tenancy to the person left in occupation on the death of a tenant or offer an alternative tenancy. Each case will be considered on its own merit. The decision will be made by the Housing Manager.

If an occupant of the property is not allowed to succeed to that tenancy, they will be asked to join the Housing Register and be considered under this Policy.

Exclusions

The Localism Act 2011 (s.160ZA (6) and (7)) enables us to disqualify the following 4 groups from accessing Sunderland Council Housing Service properties:

1. People whose behaviour makes them unacceptable to us

You do not qualify for access to Sunderland Council Housing Service if we are satisfied that you or a member of your household who will live with you:

- has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour that is serious enough to make the person unsuitable to be offered housing and, when we consider the application, we believe that the person remains unsuitable to be offered housing because of that behaviour.

We may regard an applicant or any member of their household as having been guilty of unacceptable behaviour if any of the following statements applies to them (this is not meant to be a complete [list](#)):

- They have been convicted of a drug-related offence*.
- They have been convicted of a violent criminal offence that we consider makes them a threat to the local community*.
- They have been convicted of a sex-related offence that we consider makes them a threat to the local community*.
- They have any other conviction which, in our opinion, makes them a threat to the local community*.
- They have perpetrated violence, domestic violence, racial violence or harassment.
- They have been abusive to, attacked or threatened staff.
- They have a history of anti-social behaviour or are subject to an anti-social behaviour order.
- They have a record of unacceptable rent/mortgage arrears** to local councils or other landlords/lenders (including associated court costs).
- They have been evicted on any of the grounds in Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1985 or any statutory amendment or re-enactment of it.
- They have unsatisfactory tenancy reports.
- They have damaged a current or previous rented home, and owe money for 'rechargeable repairs'.
- They have knowingly given a false statement or given false information when applying to join our housing register.

* Spent convictions will not be taken into account during our assessment.

Until the applicant can demonstrate better behaviour, we will not consider another application from them if we have disqualified them. For applicants (or household members) with rent or mortgage arrears, Sunderland Council Housing Service has a repayment standard that they expect applicants to follow. This means they need to show significant signs of change before they can access our housing. Significant signs of change will be determined by Sunderland Council Housing Service.

2. People who are not active on the Housing Register

We will not accept applicants who are not registered and active on Sunderland City Council's Housing Register.

3. Tenants who have (a) signed up to a new tenancy in the last 12 months with Sunderland Council Housing Service, and (b) who we regard as adequately housed.

All new adequately housed tenants will be disqualified until one year after their tenancy start date unless they have had a material change of circumstances since their tenancy start date.

4. People aged 18-21 who have no income to pay their rent

In certain circumstances, single applicants aged 18-21 may not have any income to pay their rent and will be disqualified until they can provide evidence that their financial situation has changed. From April 2017, automatic entitlement to housing support as part of a claim for Universal Credit will be removed.

Exemptions will apply to the following:

1. Claimant households who are responsible for a child.
2. All claimants who are not in the 'all work related requirements' conditionality group (broadly, this means certain people who are unable to work).
3. Claimants who were previously in local authority care.
4. Claimants receiving the care component of disability living allowance at the middle or highest rate or the daily living component of personal independence payment.
5. Claimants who are subject to active multi-agency management (this means arrangements for managing risks posed by certain offenders).
6. Claimants in temporary accommodation provided by a local authority under its homelessness duties.
7. Claimants whose 'expected hours of work' have been reduced because of their caring responsibilities or physical or mental impairment.
8. Those for whom work-related requirements cannot be imposed because of the range of time- limited circumstances prescribed in sub-paragraphs (3) and (4) of regulation 99 of the 2013 regulations (the recently bereaved, those in treatment for addiction, etc).
9. Claimants who are in work.
10. Claimants who are unable to live in the parental home because:
 - (a) they are orphans
 - (b) their parents live abroad, or
 - (c) in the Secretary of State's opinion, it would not be appropriate for them to live in the parental home.

Sunderland Council Housing Service will consider each case on an individual basis, taking into account all relevant circumstances including health, dependants and care and support needs. If an applicant is excluded from Sunderland Council Housing Service, we will write to them stating the reasons for the exclusion, the period of time for which they are excluded and how they can remedy the situation. The applicant then has the right to request a review of the decision **within**

21 days of receiving the initial decision letter. The member of staff reviewing the decision will notify the person of the outcome in writing **within 8 weeks** of receiving the request for the review.

Appeals

You are entitled to an appeal in the following circumstances:

- If we decide you are not eligible for or do not qualify because of unacceptable behaviour.
- You have been removed from the Housing Register, except at your own request.
- You feel you have been unfairly treated in the letting process. This could include unfair treatment over a housing offer* or in the band awarded, or if you have been skipped when next in turn on a shortlist to be matched to a property.

*Any request for a review of a housing offer to statutorily homeless applicants will be dealt with under section 202 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 by the local authority's Housing Solutions service (and not as part of this policy's appeal process).

You will have 21 days to appeal from the date of our notification letter. If you do not receive the letter, we will regard you as having received it if we have made it available at our offices for a reasonable period for collection (this is in line with section 160ZA of the Housing Act 1996).

We operate a 3-stage appeal process. While the appeal continues, you keep your assessed status until the appeal's outcome. We will not hold a property available to you pending the appeal's outcome.

The appeal process is as follows:

Stage 1

If you appeal a decision, we will acknowledge your appeal within 7 days and ask you to send any further written comments or new information that could be relevant. You should send this to us within 14 days.

In exceptional circumstances and if a case is complex, we may hold an oral hearing. You would be invited to attend the oral hearing. You would also be informed whether and by whom you may be represented at the hearing. If you are in a prison or detention centre, the hearing could be held there so that you could attend. The relevant people in the appeals process would still attend where possible.

Your appeal will be considered by a senior officer not involved in the original decision. We will notify you in writing of the decision and the reasons for it within 6 weeks of your original appeal.

Stage 2

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, you may want to take it to the next stage. If so, you must make further written comments to the Housing Manager of Sunderland Council Housing Service within 14 days of receiving the Stage 1 decision letter.

In exceptional circumstances and if a case is complex, we may hold an oral hearing. You would be invited to attend the oral hearing. You would also be informed whether and by whom you may be represented at the hearing. If you are in a prison or detention centre, the hearing could be held there so that you could attend. The relevant people in the appeals process would still attend where possible.

We will notify you in writing of the decision and the reasons for it within 14 days of the Stage 2 appeal.

Stage 3

If you are still dissatisfied with the appeal's outcome, our Senior Housing Manager will consider any third-stage appeal you make. You must make such an appeal within 14 days of receiving the Stage 2 decision. If the Senior Housing Manager is absent, a Housing Manager (Chair of the Sunderland Council Housing Board) will respond to the appeal.

In exceptional circumstances and if a case is complex, we may hold an oral hearing. You would be invited to attend the oral hearing. You would also be informed whether and by whom you may be represented at the hearing. If you are in a prison or detention centre, the hearing could be held there so that you could attend. The relevant people in the appeals process would still attend where possible.

We will notify you in writing of the decision and the reasons for it within 21 days of the Stage 3 appeal.

This Stage 3 decision will be final. We will not consider any further appeal unless you have the right to appeal to the county court on a point of law within 21 days. We will inform you if this is so.

9. Monitoring our policy

We will monitor our policy to assess whether:

- it is meeting its aims and objectives and working well
- it should be changed
- it complies with our duty to give reasonable preference
- it meets equality and diversity criteria.

To ensure that applicants in the greatest housing need (band 1) and the reasonable preference categories are using the scheme effectively, we will closely monitor their bidding activity.

The policy will be reviewed annually, which will be the responsibility of Sunderland City Council Housing Service.

False information or failure to provide information

Section 171 of the Housing Act 1996 makes it an offence for anyone seeking assistance from the landlord to:

- knowingly or recklessly make a false statement
- knowingly withhold information that the local authority reasonably requires in connection with a housing application.

Such offences can be committed in providing false information:

- on or about an application form.
- in connection with re-registration or a change in circumstances.
- during the proceedings of a review or any other circumstances that affect a housing application.

A person guilty of an offence under section 171 of the Act may be fined up to £5,000. The local authority and social housing providers may seek possession of a tenancy they have granted as the result of a false statement by the tenant or anyone acting on their behalf.

For further information, please telephone Sunderland City Council

0191 5205555

Appendix 1 – Banding -summary

Band One - Urgent Housing Need	Band Two - Priority Housing Need	Band 3 - General Housing Need	Band 1 plus – Area Renewal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants or a member of their household who are unable to cope in their present home due to medical reasons • Applicants who are experiencing severe harassment and have been assessed as being at risk if not re-housed • Applicants who are experiencing domestic abuse and have been assessed as being in immediate risk if not re-housed • Applicants owed the Relief Duty who are likely to become owed the Main Housing Duty. • Accepted homeless cases, where the applicant is owed the Main Housing Duty. • Applicants living in a property which is unfit for occupation agreed by Sunderland City Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants with a medical need which could be eased or improved by rehousing • Applicants who need to move for a welfare reason • Applicants assessed as needing to move to receive or give support • Applicants who need to move to avoid hardship • Applicants at risk of homelessness (Prevention Duty) • Other homeless applicants who do not satisfy the Band 1 criteria. • Applicants assessed as needing to move to take up Key Worker employment • Applicants moving on from supported accommodation. • Applicants assessed as overcrowded in social tenancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All applicants without an urgent or priority need to move 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants who are currently living in a Sunderland City Council renewal area

Band One - Urgent Housing Need	Band Two - Priority Housing Need	Band 3 - General Housing Need	Band 1 plus – Area Renewal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicants who are statutorily overcrowded as assessed by the City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicants assessed as under occupying the property in social tenancy• Applicants with children under 16 years who are living in an upper flat in social tenancy• Care leavers at risk of homelessness.		

Housing Services

Appendix 2 – Medical framework

Medical priority will only be awarded if rehousing will relieve the harmful effect.

Urgent medical priority (band 1)

- The applicant (or member of the household) cannot be discharged from hospital because their current home is unsuitable (including those in an intermediate care bed waiting for a local authority care package to be applied); or the applicant (or household member) requires 24-hour care that cannot be given in their current home but a new home will result in this care being given, and prevent the person needing to go into care or hospital.
- The applicant (or member of the household) does not have access to (or there is a severe detrimental effect* on their physical health to access) toilet or bathing facilities (or both).
- The applicant (or member of the household) cannot manage the stairs in the current property, resulting in them sleeping in a downstairs room, which may be unsuitable because it has a gas appliance, and/or because it is not a private room** for the applicant to sleep in.
- The current home cannot be adapted to enable the applicant or member of the household to access the property safely, provide wheelchair mobility within the home, or to receive the necessary care and support.
- The current home has a severe detrimental effect* on the mental health of the applicant (or member of the household), in the opinion of a relevant mental health professional***.
- The current home's features, including steps to access, or steps within, have a severe detrimental effect* on the physical health of the applicant (or member of the household).

Medical priority (band 2)

- The applicant (or member of the household) has difficulty accessing toilet or bathing facilities, including difficulty managing the stairs in their current property
– even with adaptations – to reach the facilities.
- The current home is harming the applicant's mental health (or that of a member of the household). Evidence must come from a relevant mental health professional***.

- The current home's condition or features are harming the physical health of the applicant (or member of their household). Evidence would need to come from a relevant health professional.
- The applicant has difficulty managing the upkeep of their current property and does not have members of the household who can assist.
- The applicant is currently living in suitable accommodation but needs to move nearer to relatives or friends to receive support that will relieve the effects of their medical condition.

* 'Severe detrimental effect' means the person is hospitalised or at risk of hospitalisation (and, in the case of mental health, the effect cannot be regulated by medication). There must be strong evidence for any risk identified.

** A 'private room' is defined as a room (not open plan) where there is no effect on any other household member (ie not a living room, and not a dining room that is a through room to a kitchen, downstairs toilet or utility room).

*** 'Relevant mental health professional' should be a consultant psychiatrist or a community psychiatric nurse (CPN). A GP can assess severe effect caused by the current housing but only if a referral has been made to (or from) a psychiatrist or a CPN.

Welfare

'Welfare' means any reason that reduces a person's quality of life. We can award welfare priority to take account of the circumstances of an applicant or member of their household or those of a person to whom they provide care or support. Occupying the current property must be harming the applicant or care receiver and moving to alternative accommodation (and/or area) must be likely to relieve the harm.

Therefore, an applicant will only qualify for welfare priority if they (or a member of the household) meet any of the following criteria:

- Needing to move nearer to family or friends to give or receive support (non- medical), and failure to do so could result in the person needing support being unable to continue living independently.
- Needing support or being vulnerable because of learning disabilities.
- Needing support or being vulnerable because of dependence on alcohol or drugs.
- Fleeing domestic abuse, but has not been assessed as statutorily homeless. In these cases a referral must be made from the Police or Wearside Women In Need.

Needing to move because they are the victim of serious harassment or violence****, and this is reducing their quality of life.

- Needing to move to access certain special facilities, such as a special school or health care.
- A 'split household' where joint applicants are currently unable to live together as a family household – because they reside in 2 separate properties – as their main residence.

**** Police confirmation will be required to confirm that the applicant is a victim of serious harassment or violence.

Appendix 3 – Arrears owing to previous and current landlords

We will investigate rent arrears owing to landlords or mortgage lenders over the previous 6 years:

Assessed arrears (previous 5-year address history) total will include:

rent arrears

court costs

rechargeable repairs

mortgage arrears

We will look at each case on its own merits:

Individual of circumstances and vulnerabilities

In all genuine cases – where it can be evidenced or reasonably argued that arrears have accrued through genuine cause or circumstance and where an applicant could not have been expected to pay costs incurred at that time (or since, as the case may be) – the applicant will not be expected to keep to the repayment rules below. However, applicants must still take positive steps to address arrears, ie set up a repayment plan and maintain regular payments before being rehoused.

If we cannot find genuine reasons why you did not pay the money owed and/or why you have not made significant steps to repay this money, we will expect you to set up a repayment plan for a certain amount of time before we allow you to access SCHS homes.