

Feedback from consultation on Housing Needs' Strategies and Policies

Stakeholders involved in the consultation include other Council departments, Registered Providers, organisations who support and advise homeless people, the voluntary and community sector and residents groups.

The consultation included:

- Consultation event 1 September 2015- feedback from presentations, roundtable discussions and from individual delegates from Registered Providers, organisations who support and advise homeless people, the voluntary and community sector and residents groups
- Consultation with the Harrow Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (HFTRA) on 23 September 2015
- Consultation by email with stakeholders
- Consultation online on the Harrow website and Locata (also made available by post and in person)
- Information about the consultation sent to all Council tenants and leaseholders (with links to the online consultation and postal/in person options).

Proposed Changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme

The proposed change to the 5 year residency rule will have a positive impact on applicants who have lived in Harrow for less than 5 years and will have no impact on existing applicants or new applicants who have lived in Harrow for more than 5 years as they already qualify for a higher banding. Harrow Law Centre raised concerns that an applicant in Band C- is unlikely to ever be accommodated.

The proposed change to the exclusion criteria will exclude some applicants who have committed fraud but will overall be fairer to all applicants. Feedback from the consultation was that the wording should be clearer, ideally with some examples.

23 households (as at 30/09/2015) will lose band A priority as a result of the proposed change to the priority given to households overcrowded by 2 bedrooms or more who live in the private rented sector. The feedback from the consultation was that some respondents were concerned that this might have a negative impact on particular ethnic groups, the assumption being that larger and/or extended families are more prevalent within some minority ethnic groups. We will be carrying out further research into the profile of larger families in the borough as a result of the EqlA in order to make meaningful comparisons. Harrow Law Centre raised concerns about the impact of severe overcrowding on the wellbeing of children.

2 households (as at 30/09/2015) will lose band B priority as a result of the proposed change to the priority given to accepted homeless and qualifying offer applicants living outside of the M25 area.

68 households (as at 30/09/2015) will retain the band B priority given to them under the transitional relief arrangements, as a result of the proposed extension of these. Feedback from the consultation was positive on this.

The proposed change to the debt and arrears policy will exclude some applicants but will be fairer to all applicants. Harrow Law Centre asked that each case be considered on its merits and suggested that under-occupiers be excluded.

4 households (as at 30/09/2015) will gain A+ priority as a result of the proposed change to the priority given to tenancy succession and unauthorised occupiers.

The proposed extension of the option of direct offers of public rented housing to accepted homeless applicants will have a positive impact on accepted homeless applicants who would otherwise not be made a direct offer but will have the negative impact of reducing their choice.

The proposal to deal with some homeseekers under homelessness instead of awarding housing register priority (if they have an urgent need to move, have a significant risk to health, wellbeing and/or safety and where the council are unable to provide a timely offer of suitable public rented housing) will have a positive impact on applicants in these circumstances as their waiting time will be reduced but is likely to result in them being offered private rented housing rather than public rented housing. Harrow Law Centre does not support this change.

The proposal to reduce the banding of applicants in cases where there has been a deliberate change of circumstances which has resulted in the worsening of a household's circumstances will have a negative impact on these applicants but will be fairer to all applicants. Harrow Law Centre raised concerns that this is subjective and rare.

Procurement of Temporary Accommodation

Overall the feedback was that information about the procurement of temporary accommodation should be communicated in a clear manner so that people can make informed decisions. There was support for more partnership working with Registered Providers and new ideas such as pop-up homes.

Allocation of Temporary Accommodation

Overall there was support for incentive schemes and for publicising positive case studies of families who have moved out of London.

Concerns were raised about people moving away from their social and community networks, particularly single parent families where mothers are not working because they are caring for young children.

Concerns were also raised about disrupting children's education, including when they have started GCSEs or A-Levels and for those with special educational needs, and disrupting support given to children under safeguarding.

We will be monitoring the profile of applicants being accommodated outside of Harrow and outside of the M25 in view of concerns raised during the consultation and as a result of the EqIA.