

Tees Valley Home Finder Common Allocation Policy Consultation 2024

Summary Report

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Background

The Tees Valley Lettings Partnership consisting of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Middlesbrough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Council, Beyond Housing and North Star Housing operate a Common Allocations Policy for the allocation of social/affordable housing. The partnership conducted a review of the current Common Allocations Policy.

The review exercise took place between April 2024 and August 2024, representatives from all the partnership areas were invited to join a review task and finish group. The group met in person on several occasions and a detailed review of each section of the current policy was undertaken to establish if the policy was creating any obstacles to customers in housing need securing suitable housing.

In 2024 in Stockton-on-Tees there has been an average of 16 properties advertised per week, each advert attracts on average 113 bids, and in Middlesbrough an average of 13 properties advertised per week attracting on average 97 bids per property.

The outcome of the review was a proposal of several changes which were subject to consultation. The consultation was open for responses from Monday the 7th October until 12 noon on Monday the 18th November.

A full copy of the consultation can be found in Appendix B.

Contacts

Customer Contacts Made		
Organisation	Emails	Letters
SBC/MBC	5787	60
North Star	115	5
Beyond & RCC	2406	36
Total	8409	

Registered Providers contacted:

Thirteen Housing Group	Bernicia	Housing 21
Anchor	Broadacres	Karbon Homes
My Space	Habinteg	Livin
Accent	Hellens Residential	Places for People
Believe Housing	Home Group	Railway Housing Association

A full list of commissioned service providers and VCSE representatives who were contacted can be found in Appendix A.

Registered Providers, Commissioned Housing Services and VCSE Responses

In total seven separate registered providers and commissioned services providers responded to the consultation.

1. Thirteen Housing Group
2. Home Group
3. Livin
4. Stockton Churches Mission (Bridge House)
5. Broadacres Housing Association
6. Habinteg Housing Association
7. New Walk CIC

In total two representatives of the VCSE sector responded to the consultation.

1. EVA Womens Aid
2. Changing Lives

Each provider was emailed directly on the 7th October 2024 with a reminder email being issued on the 7th November. The details of the providers responses can be found in Appendix B.

Summary

- Over 59% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with all questions.
- Positive response from residents.
- Disappointing response from the RP and VCSE sector.
- The question which provoked the strongest positive response was question 2, Anti-Social Behaviour. 68.91% of respondents strongly agreed with the proposal.
- The question which provoked the strongest negative response was question 4, Priority removed due to inactivity. 8.65% of respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal.
- Less than 10% of residents strongly disagreed with all questions.
- A total of 190 individual comments were received, the top three categories were:
 1. A general comment agreeing with the proposal.
 2. Bedroom need criteria should not be included in the policy.
 3. Working individuals and families should be given a higher banding priority.

Next Steps

The Task and Finish Group met in person on the 28th November 24 and the Steering Group met virtually on the 4th December 24 the consultation responses were reviewed in full and a collective decision to proceed with the review process was made. The next Task and Finish Group meeting is on the 6th January 2025 where a draft policy will be produced.

Appendix A

Registered Providers, Commissioned Housing Services and VCSE Responses

The commissioned services and VCSE sector representatives contacted are detailed in the table below.

Homeless SA Contract:	Turnaround Homes
Stockton Churches Mission	Sanctuary
New Walk	Community Campus

NACRO

CAB

Red Cross

Refugee Futures

Refugee Voices

Diversity Inside Us

Stockton Baptist Church

Justic First

City of Sanctuary

One Community Link

Stockton Family Action

Salvation Army

Changing Lives

Little Sprouts

SSAFA

Veterans Gateway

Royal British Legion

Probation Service

Harbour

VCSE Sector operating in Stockton & Middlesbrough:

EVA

Catalyst

My Sisters Place

Open Door NE

Zoes Place – Normanby/Eston

Appendix B

Common Allocation Policy Review 2024 Consultation Questions

Question One

Please select which option best represents you:

- I am a resident living within the Tees Valley Home-Finder partnership area.
- I am a staff member of a Tees Valley Home-Finder Partnership organisation.
- I am a representative of the Registered Provider sector.
- I am a representative of the VCSE Sector
- Other (e.g. an advocate acting behalf of an applicant)

(To appear when options 2,3 or 4 are selected above)

Please state the name of the organisation you are completing the consultation on behalf of:

Open text box restricted to 30 characters

Do you currently have a Live Tees Valley Home-Finder account application?

- Yes
- No

Question Two

Local Connection

Currently applicants do not need a local connection to register an account on Tees Valley Home-Finder and bid for housing within the partnership area. However, priority for housing is given to those with a local connection.

The Proposal

Considering the current significant demand for housing and an increase in applications from outside the partnership area, it is proposed that a local connection is required in order for an applicant to register and apply for housing via Tees Valley Home Finder across the three Local Authority partnership areas.

Applicants will be counted as having a local connection to a Local Authority area if they fit one or more of the following categories:

1. They live in the Local Authority area and have lived there for 6 out of the past 12 months or 3 out of the past 5 years*
2. They have close family connections with someone who has been resident in the Local Authority area for a minimum of five years. A close family connection is defined as a parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, legal guardian; or
3. Their regular place of work is located within any of the Local Authority areas.

**Exclusions would apply to accommodation that an individual may have been directed to reside such as Approved Premises, Prison and Bail Hostels. It also would not include Care Homes and Hospitals.*

Applicants leaving the armed forces and victims of domestic abuse will not need to have a local connection. Divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of Service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence will also be exempted from local connection requirements. A local connection will be applied across all 3 Local Authorities areas for these applicants.

Applicants eligible under the Homes for Ukraine scheme will have local connection to the Local Authority of the host family that they were placed with.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Three

Anti-Social Behaviour

The current policy states the following in relation to anti-social behaviour:

If the applicant (or a member of their household) is found to be guilty of 'unacceptable' behaviour (which includes a history of anti-social behaviour), they may be excluded from the partnership housing register for **12 months**.

The Proposal

Due to the increase of anti-social behaviour and the impact this has on communities it is proposed that this timeframe is extended to **36 months**. This will impact individuals who have been served notice, evicted or had a property closure due to anti-social behaviour only.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Four

Priority Bidding

The current policy states the following in relation to keeping the partnership register up to date:

Applicants with a priority for housing will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are not having difficulties with the scheme and to check that they are applying for suitable properties as they come up.

The Proposal

Customers who are in Bands 1, 2 and 3 will be expected to bid for suitable properties using the priority awarded to them. Applicants who do not bid **may** have their priority removed if there have been suitable properties advertised and they have failed to place bids on them.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Five

Band One Plus Demolition or Regeneration

Currently people living in the partnership area who are losing their home due to demolition or regeneration are allocated Band One housing priority in the area which they live.

The Proposal

It is proposed that a new Band One Plus banding is created and those customers who are losing their home due to demolition or regeneration would be provided with the higher priority banding.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Six

HM Armed Forces Community

The current policy states:

People leaving the HM Armed Forces community. This will include a member of the Armed Forces (serving or has formerly served in the regular forces; serving or has formerly served in the reserved forces; a bereaved spouse/civil partner; divorced spouse/civil partner*) are allocated Band One Priority.

Applicants will need to be assessed by the Local Authority Homelessness Teams before this priority will be awarded.

The Proposal

It is proposed that a new Band One Plus banding is created and those customers leaving the armed forces community (serving or has formerly served in the regular forces; serving or has formerly served in the reserved forces; a bereaved spouse/civil partner; divorced spouse/civil partner*) with an **urgent need** for housing would be provided with the higher priority banding. Applicants will need to be assessed by the Local Authority Homelessness Teams before this priority will be awarded.

And:

Those leaving the Armed Forces community (serving or has formerly served in the regular forces; serving or has formerly served in the reserved forces; a bereaved spouse/civil partner; divorced spouse/civil partner*) within the last five years with **no** urgent housing need will be allocated Band Three Priority on their **first tenancy only**.

** For this purpose, “the regular forces” and “the reserve forces” have the meanings given by section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006(2).”.*

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Seven

Homelessness

The current Policy States that homelessness applicants are awarded Band One housing regardless of their assessed priority need:

People assessed as statutorily homeless and in priority need

People who have been accepted as statutorily homeless and in priority need and where the main homeless duty is owed (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996). People in this category may receive a direct offer of housing.

Applicants will need to be assessed by the Local Authority Homelessness Teams before this priority will be awarded.

Applicants who, following assessment, are owed the homelessness prevention or relief duty. *

* If duty has been discharged through the refusal of a reasonable offer of accommodation, the applicant will be placed into Band 4. If the duty is discharged for any other reason, the applicant will be placed into the Band appropriate to their assessed housing needs.

Applicants will need to be assessed by the Local Authority Homelessness Teams before this priority will be awarded.

The Proposal

It is proposed that homelessness applicants following assessment by the Local Authority Homelessness Teams would be split across **three** priority bands.

Band One Priority would be allocated only to those applicants who are homeless living in temporary accommodation arranged by one of the partner Local Authorities, or are owed a main or relief duty and are in priority need as in accordance with Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (the homelessness legislation) and there is an urgent need to free up the temporary accommodation, or move in order to fulfil the above duties.

Band Two Priority would be allocated to those applicants who, following a homeless assessment are owed a prevention or relief duty with no priority need.

Band Three Priority would be allocated to those applicants where a relief duty has ended after 56 days, and it has been determined the applicant has been deemed to be intentionally homeless.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Eight

Young People Leaving the Care of the Local Authority

The current policy states

As defined in the Children Act 1989, where a formal referral has been made by Social Services with the aim of safeguarding the welfare of the child or children or a child/children leaving the care of the Local Authority under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 are awarded Band Two housing priority.

The Proposal

An individual leaving the care of the Local Authority under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 who have been assessed as ready for independent living will be awarded Band One Priority.

And:

Those individuals who do not qualify for Band One Priority would be awarded Band Two Priority for their first tenancy only.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Nine

Medical Grounds

The current policy states

Applicants who have been assessed by one of the Partners as requiring alternative accommodation because their medical condition (physical or mental health) and/or disability is having a significantly detrimental effect on their ability to live in their current home.

Applicants will be referred to the relevant Local Authority Team for assessment by an Occupational Therapist before any Band award is made under this category.

Currently applicants assessed under the category of Urgent Medical are awarded Band Two Priority.

The Proposal

It is proposed that a new category of Emergency Medical Grounds is created and applicants who are assessed as requiring emergency accommodation are allocated Band One Priority.

This banding will only be allocated to those individuals with an emergency housing need due to medical problems which are exacerbated by their current housing situation, and applicants being discharged from hospital where their housing is unsuitable and cannot be made suitable through adaptations. Other urgent medical cases will remain in Band Two.

Each case will be assessed individually, and applicants will be referred to the relevant Local Authority Team for assessment by an Occupational Therapist or Secondary Mental Health Service before any Band award is made under this category. The assessment is not of the applicant's health but how their accommodation affects their health or welfare therefore **the impact of the property will be assessed and not the prognosis of the illness.**

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Ten

Child Protection

Currently only applications with a "child in need" are allocated priority housing at Band Two.

The current policy states:

As defined in the Children Act 1989, where a formal referral has been made by Social Services with the aim of safeguarding the welfare of the child or children.

The Proposal.

A new category of Child Protection will be introduced as a Band One Priority. This will be allocated where there is evidence of a **serious threat** to the well-being of a child and their accommodation is a **significant** contributory factor to the risk. Referrals will be made by allocated Social Worker's only.

The child in need Band Two Priority will remain and allocated to those assessed where the accommodation is being a key factor to the risk of the child.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Eleven

Special Guardianship Order

The current Policy States

Adoptive parents or prospective adoptive parents/foster carers

Those who need to move due to their current accommodation being unsuitable or who need to move to a different location to safeguard or promote the well-being of the child or children they have adopted or are planning to adopt or foster children in foster care.

Applicants will be required to provide documentation from the Local Authority to confirm their adoptive/foster carer status before any Band award is made under this category.

Applicants assessed under this category are awarded Band Two Priority.

The Proposal

It is proposed that Special Guardianship a family court order that places a child or young person in long-term care with someone other than their parent(s) (Adoption and Children Act 2002) is also included within this category.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Twelve

Acute Overcrowding

The current policy states people living in overcrowded conditions are awarded Band Three Priority Banding.

Overcrowding is assessed on the number of people within the household and according to the best use of bedrooms and sleeping spaces available. The calculation shown below is used to determine overcrowding.

Under-occupation and overcrowding will be assessed based upon the number of people within the household and according to best use of the bedrooms to reflect the criteria set out by the Department of Work and Pensions.

One bedroom will be considered suitable for:

- An Adult /Adult Couple.

- Two children of the same sex under the age of 16.
- Two children under the age of 10 regardless of their sex.
- Any other person aged 16 or over; or
- Any other child that cannot be matched with the above.

Please note: This assessment does not include living room space unless there is a second living room which can be used as a bedroom, and it does not breach health and safety standards. Where a bedroom is being used for another purpose e.g., study or toy room, its original function as a bedroom will be used in assessing the level of under occupation or overcrowding. The main householder(s) will be expected to share a bedroom with a child under the age of 12 months.

Additional Bedrooms

There may be some circumstances where a household is allowed an extra bedroom as detailed below:

- Health reasons.
- Bedroom for an overnight carer.
- Joint custody or overnight access to a child/children; or
- Prospective adopters and foster carers.

Where one of the above applies, evidence will be requested, and an affordability check may need to be completed to make sure the applicant can afford the additional bedroom.

The Proposal

It is proposed that a new category of Acute Overcrowding is introduced and awarded Band Two priority. This category will be awarded where an applicant household is severely overcrowded requiring two or more additional bedrooms according to the criteria set out by the Department of Works and Pensions stated above. Other cases of overcrowding will remain in Band Three.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Thirteen

Senior Management Discretion

This category applies to Stockton Borough Council and Middlesbrough Council only.

There is no current policy which allows for senior management discretion.

The Proposal

Both Stockton and Middlesbrough Local Authorities expect that the vast majority of allocations will be made following the allocations scheme rules according to priority banding. However, there may be exceptional circumstances where the only way an **exceptionally urgent** housing need can be resolved is using senior management discretion. It is important, in fairness to all applicants that these discretionary powers are used in genuinely exceptional cases for example witness protection cases.

Within the Boroughs of Middlesbrough and Stockton these cases will be reviewed on an individual basis by the Local Authority, Housing Service/Team (TBC) and a priority banding may be awarded.

Within the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland there is a quota system in operation, which ensures that a proportion of lettings is made available to applicants within each band. Therefore, the category of Manager's Discretion is not applicable in Redcar and Cleveland.

Please select the option which best represents your opinion on this proposal.

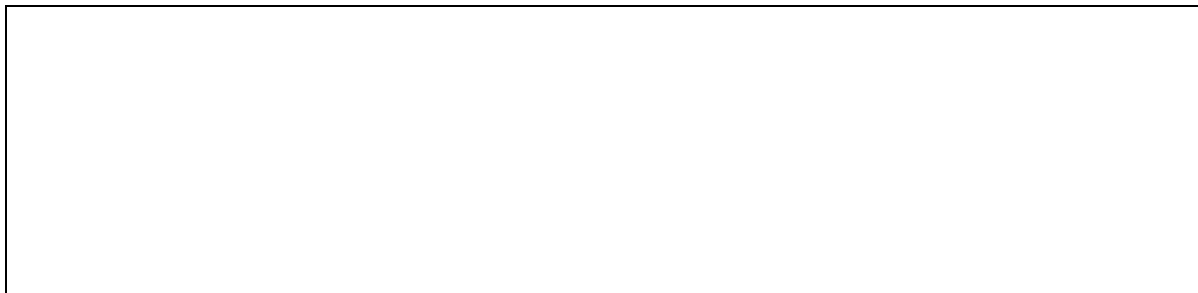
- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree/Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

Question Fourteen

Any further comments

If you have any further comments regarding the consultation and the proposals, please detail them in the box below. Please do not provide any comments on individual circumstances or provide any personal information.

Free text box, restricted to 100 characters.



If you have any concerns regarding a current live application on Tees Valley Home Finder, please direct these to the Partner Agency who manages your application.

Contact details for the Tees Valley Letting Partnership are:

Partner Agency	Email	Telephone
Stockton Borough Council	tvlp@stockton.gov.uk	01642 524345
Middlesbrough Council	tvlp@stockton.gov.uk	01642 524345
Redcar & Cleveland Council	housingclientservices@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk	01642 774774
North Star Housing	customerservices@northstarhg.co.uk	0300 0110011
Beyond Housing	enquiries@beyondhousing.co.uk	0345 0655656