

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Housing Allocations Policy

Implemented May 2013



HOUSING

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PART I INTRODUCTION

The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 states that it is the duty of every local housing authority to publish a summary of its policy for the allocation of its housing accommodation. The summary should be available free of charge to any member of the public who asks for it.

The full policy should be available for inspection at the principal office of the local housing authority to members of the public without charge.

This document sets out the allocations policy of the Council and is available for inspection at the Housing Operations Division, Civic Centre, York Street, Twickenham, and on the public website www.richmond.gov.uk. Copies of the document are obtainable free of charge.

This document, which was approved by the Council's Cabinet in February 2012, is designed to set out for our customers and all agencies working with the department, what the Council's policy is in respect of nominating people to Registered Social Landlords for offers of permanent accommodation.

PART II ACCESS TO HOUSING

1 Policy

The Allocations Policy is formulated to ensure that those who fall within the statutory reasonable preference category are afforded due priority.

There are local policy priorities which include:

To give priority to those households with a stronger local connection rather than residents who do not have a local connection with the borough.

To reduce welfare dependency by giving some priority to those households who work or who make a community contribution.

Allocating on the basis of scarce resources and encouraging financial responsibility.

Using the resources available to us as efficiently as possible and retaining some flexibility to respond to fluctuations in demand from different client groups.

To be transparent and honest with customers who have low priority for housing and offer realistic advice on their prospects of being made an offer of accommodation.

2. Eligibility

An allocation of housing accommodation cannot be made to a person who is ineligible as a result of legislation,.

2.1 Persons ineligible as a result of legislation

- Persons under 16 years of age;
- Persons who do not have the mental capacity to enter into a contract of tenancy;
- Persons who need leave to enter or remain in the UK unless they come within one of the classes prescribed by regulations.

Applicants that are considered to be ineligible for an allocation will be notified in writing, giving reasons for the decision. The letter will also advise them of their right to a review of the decision.

3. Reasonable Preference Categories

Section 166A(3) Housing Act 1996 requires local housing authorities to give reasonable preference to the following categories of applicant:

- People who are homeless within the meaning of Part VII of the 1996 Act as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, which will include

homeless people who are intentionally homeless and not in priority need.

- People who are owed a homelessness duty:
 - i) Homeless persons in priority need who are intentionally homeless
 - ii) Homeless persons in priority need who are not intentionally homeless
 - iii) Persons in priority need and who are unintentionally threatened with homelessness
 - iv) Persons not in priority need who are not intentionally homeless and are being housed under section 192(3)

However, for the purposes of assessing priority under the above, restricted persons (within the meaning of Part 7, Housing Act 1996) are to be disregarded.

- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds or grounds relating to disability;
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the local housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

4. Additional Preference Categories

Section 166A(3) gives housing authorities the power to award additional preference to particular descriptions of people who fall within the reasonable preference categories and who have urgent housing needs. Examples include the following:

- Those owed a homelessness duty as a result of violence likely to be carried out and who as a result require urgent rehousing, including:
 - i) Victims of violence including domestic abuse.
 - ii) Victims of racial harassment amounting to violence or threats of violence
 - iii) Same sex couples who are victims of harassment amounting to violence or threats of violence
 - iv) Witnesses of crime, or victims of crime, who would be at risk of intimidation amounting to violence or threats of violence if they remained in their current homes.
- Those who need to move because of urgent medical reasons.

5. Assessment of Housing Needs/Points Scheme

An initial check to see if an applicant is eligible and qualifies to apply will be made. If accepted onto the Register their housing needs will be assessed.

The housing need of all customers is assessed via the Richmond Housing Register application form. All applications are assessed and awarded points in line with the points scheme. The information used to assess the application is the information provided by the applicant.

The points scheme is framed to ensure that priority is given to those persons who fall within the reasonable preference categories. Further priority is awarded to those applicants who qualify under more than one category.

5.13 Persons owed a homelessness duty under Part VII of the Act

5.1.1 Households accepted as homeless under the terms of the Housing Act 1996 (The 1996 Act) will be assessed under the points scheme, unless the duty is discharged in another way.

Acceptance of a homeless duty does not mean an applicant will receive an offer of social housing. Ordinarily, a homeless applicant is likely to be made an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector.

5.1.2 New freedom to discharge the homelessness duty into the private sector

- It is proposed that each case is judged on merit, but that generally these groups would be excluded from a private sector homelessness discharge:
- Elderly (people over retirement age)
- Disabled people
- Those vulnerable groups who require local supported housing or have a medical condition that requires them to live locally.
- ex service personnel
- People in work where the offer would make it impractical for them to keep their job
- those families where children are due to sit GCSEs within 24 months
- those families with children with statements, who are also assessed as particularly vulnerable by Children's Services through their Special Educational Needs Panel
- Those families with children with a serious medical problem where in view of the independent medical advisor the upheaval might risk it worsening.

Applicants will be awarded 50 points for being homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Applicants who are living in temporary accommodation, including those in a women's refuge will be awarded 50 points for being homeless or threatened with homelessness and 25 time in need points each month, until they reach the ceiling of 900 points. These time in need points will commence from the temporary accommodation tenancy start date.

5.14 Persons applying to the register under Part VI of the Act

5.14.1 50 points if homeless/threatened with homelessness

All persons who are threatened with homelessness will be awarded 50 points. Homelessness or threat of homelessness could be for the following reasons:

- Being issued with a valid Notice to Quit if renting;
- Being issued with a valid Notice if a homeowner;
- Being asked to leave relatives/friends accommodation.

Documentation to confirm the situation will be required, such as a copy of any notice and a letter from the relative/friend if asking the applicant to leave. A telephone call will be made to verify that the person actually wrote the letter. Once the applicant has reached the points threshold, a home visit will be carried out to further confirm the living circumstances.

5.14.2 25 points if issued with court order to evict

A further 25 points will be awarded if an applicant who is renting is issued with a Court Order to evict them from the property. A copy of the court order will be required before the points can be awarded.

5.14.3 80 rough sleepers points

80 rough sleepers' points will be awarded if an applicant is sleeping rough in the borough. The applicant will need to complete a Welfare Form for People Sleeping Rough. Usually, further information from agencies within the borough will be required to confirm an applicant's situation.

The Housing Needs Officers will make recommendations to the Team Leader, Housing Provision and if it is considered there is enough information to verify that a person is sleeping rough, the 80 points will be awarded.

A letter will be sent to the applicant, confirming the information considered and the reasons for the decision.

5.14.4 Persons who are intentionally homeless

Persons who are deemed to be intentionally homeless by the Council's Housing Options Team will be able to apply to the housing register and have their application assessed under Part VI of the Act. If they are still threatened with homelessness, they may be entitled to such points.

However, it should be noted that if such applicants reach the points threshold stage, an assessment would be carried out to establish if they are guilty of unacceptable behaviour or should be suspended for tenancy arrears or damage to council property. If such applicants were made intentionally homeless, through being evicted for serious rent arrears, or anti-social behaviour, they could be deemed to be guilty of unacceptable behaviour and their application cancelled. Alternatively, the application may be suspended as stated above.

5.15 Medical Needs

Applicants or anyone else included on the application, who considers their present housing conditions are having a harmful effect on their health or the health of anyone else included in the application, will be asked to complete a Medical/Disability Self-Assessment form, describing their health problems. This will also apply to applicants or other household members who consider they need to move on grounds relating to disability.

If the form has been fully completed and signed, a report will usually be obtained from their GP, which will assist the Medical Adviser in making his recommendations

Points of 15 for significant health issues, 30 for serious or 50 for severe health problems can be awarded, depending on the extent of the illness or disability, together with how seriously the current accommodation is affecting the applicant's health.

A total of 100 points can be awarded if there is more than one person with medical needs in the household.

A maximum of 200 points can be awarded for the following:

- persons whose condition is expected to be terminal within a period of 12 months;
- persons whose condition is life threatening and their existing accommodation is further undermining their health;
- and a move is exceptionally urgent

5.16 Welfare/Social Needs

Applicants or anyone else included on the application, who considers they have welfare or social needs for settled accommodation should fully complete a Housing on Welfare/Social Grounds Form. This will also apply to applicants or other household members who consider they need to move on grounds relating to disability.

Further information will be sought from named contacts detailed on the form, who would be willing to confirm and support the applicant's welfare/social needs.

All this information will then be carefully considered by the Welfare Panel.

50 welfare points will be awarded if it is considered that an applicant does have a substantial welfare/social need for settled accommodation. The following are examples of what might constitute such a need:

- Fear of violence;
- Harassment and racial harassment;
- The need to be near relatives for support/care needs;
- The need to be near a hospital, GP, Special Needs School;
- Welfare/ social/ educational effects of overcrowding in the home;

100 welfare points will be awarded in the most serious cases such as child protection or adult safeguarding.

200 welfare points can be awarded in exceptional circumstances.

The applicant will be notified in writing of the panel's decision, including details of the information considered and reasons for the decision. In some cases, further information will be required before a decision can be made and this will be communicated.

5.17 Property Defects

Applicants who are living in accommodation that requires minor repairs affecting the occupants' health will be awarded 10 points. Applicants who are living in accommodation that is in serious disrepair will be referred to the Residential Team within Housing Services. If they confirm the property is in a serious state of disrepair, written confirmation will need to be provided. In addition, the Housing Needs Officers will complete a Summary Form.

The Team Leader Housing Provision will assess all the information and make a decision to award 50 or 200 points where there is an urgent need to move, where 50 points represents serious disrepair affecting the occupier's health and 200 points represents the property being uninhabitable.

The decision will be put in writing to the applicant, detailing the information considered and the reasons for the decision.

5.18 Lacking/Sharing Facilities

Applicants who do not have a living room, kitchen, bathroom, toilet or hot water, or if applicants have to share them with people other than their household, the following points will be awarded:

Room or item	No facilities	Sharing facilities
COOKING FACILITIES	10	5
Hot water	5	Nil
Bath or shower	15	5
Toilet	15	5
Separate living room	10	Nil

These points will not be awarded for applicants who are living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council and do not have certain facilities, or have to share them.

5.19 Overcrowding

50 points will be given for each extra bedroom required.

5 points will be given for each person who shares a bedroom with a child of the opposite sex over the age of 10.

10 points for each person will be given if a child over the age of 5 has to share a bedroom with a parent of the opposite sex.

20 points will be given if a child over the age of 10 has to sleep in a room less than 50 square feet (4.6 metres).

Intentionally Overcrowded Households. Enquiries will be made into each application to assess whether the overcrowding is as a result of natural growth in the household or deliberately brought about for the purpose of assisting an application for housing. In this circumstance the household will not receive any overcrowding points.

5.20 Separated families

20 points will be given if an applicant's household previously lived together but now have to live in two separate homes.

40 points will be given if an applicant's household has to live in more than two separate homes.

5.21 Age

10 points will be given to applicants aged between 65 and 74 years.

20 points will be given to applicants aged between 75 and 79 years.

30 points will be given to applicants aged 80 years or more.

With regards to joint applicants, the points will be based on the older person's age.

5.22 Pregnancy

5 points will be given to applicants who are pregnant.

5.23 Low income and savings

5 points will be given to applicants who receive welfare benefits, such as income support, housing benefit, or working families tax credit.

5 points will be given to applicants who have savings of less than £3,000.

5.12 Working Households

80 points will be given where at least one member of the household is currently working and has been working for at least 6 months.

The applicant will need to demonstrate that the employment or self-employment is paid and meaningful.

In addition, to qualify this would need to be a minimum of 16 hours per week on average over 5 of the past 6 months.

Applicants will need to demonstrate they still qualify for the points at the stage of receiving an offer.

5.13 Community Contribution

50 points will be awarded to households where at least one member is making a significant contribution to the community. This could include volunteering for a not for profit organisation for a minimum of 18 hours a month or organising activities for young people. It would have to be for a minimum period of 2 years prior to the time an offer was made.

The points will not be in addition to any working points awarded and evidence will need to be provided at the point of application, activation and offer.

5.14 Local Connection

The following groups will be considered to have a local connection with the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, thereby awarding greater preference over those applicants who do not have a local connection with the borough.

- 200 points will be given to applicants who currently live in the borough and have done so continuously for more than 3 years and this is

residence of their own choice. Residence in an area is not normally of a person's own choice if it is a consequence of being detained in prison or residing in a bail hostel;

- 150 points will be given to applicants who work on a permanent basis within the borough, but live elsewhere;
- 100 points will be given to applicants who have exceptional circumstances which require them to live in this borough, e.g. to provide essential support to a relative living in this borough.
- 100 points will be given to applicants who currently live in the borough in settled accommodation but who have lived here for between 6 months and 3 years.

Applicants owed a homelessness duty and the duty has not been discharged into the private sector will normally be given 200 points. In most cases, applicants will have a local connection, but there will be some that do not. To ensure that these applicants are awarded the same degree of priority, they will also be awarded 200 points.

If an applicant moves out of the borough or employment within the borough ceases, the local connection points will be removed. A letter will be sent to notify the applicant of this.

6. People Who Are Disqualified

The following applicants will have no priority for an allocation of housing, unless there are exceptional circumstances and their application will be cancelled. The applicant will be notified in writing of this decision, including the information considered and the reasons for the decision. The letter will also advise the applicant they have a right to request a review of the decision.

6.13 Financial Resources

6.1.1 Interest in a Property

Persons who hold freehold or leasehold interest in any property unless they are in housing need as set out below. In the case of medical priority, it must be demonstrated that it would not be reasonable for the owner or member of their household to continue to occupy that property. Also, that the applicant cannot obtain a grant to make the property suitable for occupation by the applicant (household member) or they lack sufficient funds to afford their own adaptations. Also, the equity in the property is insufficient for the applicant to buy/rent a suitable property that meets the applicant's housing need, or that such properties do not exist in the private sector.

6.1.2 Household Income

Households whose joint taxable income is above £40,000 and/or whose savings are over £70,000. However, where applicants are in housing need, above the points threshold level, and are unable to meet their housing needs through the private sector, their application will be considered for approval.

In the case of income levels and savings, individual circumstances will be fully considered, as applicants with dependent children may be less able to meet their housing needs in the private sector, compared to single people or childless couples with the same level of financial resources. Therefore in

certain cases, applicants who earn over £40,000 or have savings over £70,000 will not be penalised.

6.1.3 Deprivation of Capital

Enquiries will be made into each application to ensure that household savings have not been deliberately reduced to below the threshold for the purposes of securing accommodation. Examples could include an inheritance or households who sell a property and wilfully dispose of the equity.

6.2 Fraud

Any person seeking to obtain accommodation by making a false or misleading statement or by withholding relevant information or by failing to inform the council of any material change in circumstances, is liable to have his/her application cancelled and his/her name removed from the register. In the case of a person accepted as homeless under Part VII of the Act, this may lead to prosecution under the terms of Section 214 of the 1996 Act. No further application will be accepted for a period of 5 years.

6.3 No Local Connection

Households assessed as having no local connection (see above) will not have their points assessed or be placed on the Housing Register. The exception to this is:

- a) those who are currently serving in the regular forces or who were serving in the regular forces at any time in the five years preceding their application for an allocation of social housing
- b) bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, and (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service
- c) existing or former members of the reserve forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness, or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service”

6.4 Unacceptable behaviour

The applicant or a member of his household has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour and the unacceptable behaviour is serious enough to make the applicant unsuitable to be a tenant and;

In the circumstances, at the time the application for housing is considered, in the council's view the applicant is unsuitable to be a tenant by reason of the unacceptable behaviour.

Under previous legislation, local housing authorities were limited in what behaviour they might consider to be unacceptable. Under the present legislation, the council will exercise its own judgment, having regard to the following guidelines:

- Behaviour of the applicant considered as if the applicant was a secure tenant; or
- Behaviour of a member of the applicant's household considered as if the person was residing with a secure tenant; and
- Which would establish grounds for a possession order under one of the grounds in Part 1 Sch.2 Housing Act 1985.

Main grounds in Part 1 Sch. 2;

- Rent due not paid (Ground 1)
- Obligation of the tenancy broken down or not performed (Ground 1)
- Tenant or a person residing with or visiting them is guilty of conduct causing nuisance or annoyance to another in the locality (Ground 2)
- Tenant, co-resident or visitor convicted of arrestable offences in the locality (Ground 2)
- Property condition (Ground 3)
- Inducing the granting of a tenancy by a false statement (Ground 5)

If a person is deemed to be guilty of unacceptable behaviour, they will be given no preference for an allocation of housing.

When an applicant reaches the points threshold level, all the facts of their case will be carefully considered. Recommendations will be made to the Team Leader, Housing Provision, who will decide if no priority is to be awarded on the basis of their behaviour.

The applicant will be notified in writing of the decision, including details of the information considered and the reasons for the decision. The letter will also advise that the applicant can request a review of this decision, if they do not agree with it.

Applicants will also be advised they can complete a Change of Circumstances form, if they feel their unacceptable behaviour should no longer be held against them. The Housing Provision Team will then consider this new information to reassess the application.

6.5 Refusal of an offer

If an applicant refuses a suitable, final offer of permanent accommodation they will be awarded no priority for two years, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Persons who applied directly to the housing register under Part VI of the 1996 Act or owed a homelessness duty who refuse a reasonable, final offer of accommodation, and consequently the duty towards them has been discharged, are awarded no priority for rehousing. The application will be cancelled and the applicant will be disqualified for two years unless there are exceptional circumstances. The original application will be cancelled and the applicant can re-apply at any stage. However, they would not be registered for rehousing for two years, commencing from date of refusal or, if applicable, the notification date of the discharge of duty.

6.6 Tenancy arrears or damage to council property

Households who owe money they are legally obliged to pay to their landlord (either council, private landlord, or Housing Association) or who have been

recharged by the Council for damage caused by them will ordinarily be suspended from the Housing Register. During the period of suspension they will not receive an offer of rehousing and no further points will accrue. The application will be suspended for a period of 12 months in order to allow them to enter into arrangements to repay the monies owed. If, after a period of 12 months' suspension, if the applicant has still not taken adequate steps to repay the monies owed, the application will ordinarily be disqualified. The applicant can re-apply at any stage.

For new applicants suspension would operate at the point of application and for applicants in temporary accommodation it would operate either at the point that they would normally have accrued enough points for an offer or at the point of offer.

7. Rehousing Points Thresholds

Applicants will only be actively considered for rehousing once they have reached a certain number of points, which then takes them over the rehousing threshold. The points total for each threshold will vary over time, as it is dependent on the supply and demand for such accommodation. The points threshold can be based on bedroom category, type of property, or location.

Having reached the required points threshold, all applicants will be interviewed by a Housing Officer and a Home Visit Report Form completed. This form can either be completed in the Civic Centre Offices or during a home visit. The purpose of this assessment is to verify details of the applicant's living conditions and circumstances and, where appropriate, to reassess their points entitlement. If applicants no longer satisfy the criteria for priority points, these points will be deducted.

Where two applicants in the same bedroom queue have an identical number of points, the following priority rules will apply, in the following order:-

- date of application
- number of medical points
- number of social/welfare points
- number of overcrowding points
- number of sharing points

8. Assessment of size of accommodation required

No account is taken of rooms for living or sleeping which are less than 50 square feet (4.6 square metres).

The number of bedrooms needed by a household assumes the availability of one living room. Any living accommodation in excess of this, which can be reasonably used as a bedroom, will be treated as such.

Detailed below are the sizes of accommodation that different households require.

Number of occupants	Size of accommodation
One person	Studio, including kitchen and use of bathroom.

A couple without children	One bedroom, a living room, kitchen and bathroom.
A couple, or single parent with one child. A couple, or single parent, with two children Two people of either sex who are not married or living together as partners (for example, brother and sister, mother and son)	Two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bathroom.
A couple, or single parent, with three children A couple, or single parent, with one child and one dependent relative (for example a grandparent) A couple or single parent with 2 children of the opposite sex where one of the children is 10 years or older	Three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bathroom.
Additional bedrooms will be required for additional people on the same basis as detailed above.	

A couple can be defined as two people who are either: married, in a civil partnership, or living together as a couple.

In the case of single applicants, their housing entitlement would only be for studio type accommodation, unless special circumstances exist that require larger, one-bedroom accommodation. One exception to this is the Sponsored Moves Scheme, where there is a resultant vacancy of family sized accommodation. In some cases, single person accommodation is not self-contained.

There may be other exceptional circumstances for households to have larger accommodation than detailed in the above table. For example, there may be a need for children with an age difference of less than 10 years, to have separate bedrooms on the basis of a medical condition.

The Team Leader Housing Provision and Housing Options Manager will approve any variations to the general rule on accommodation size. Recommendations will also be sought from the Council's Medical Adviser where appropriate.

9. Administration of the Housing Register

Applications to be placed on the housing register must be made to the Housing Operations Division on the prescribed form, the Richmond Housing Register Application Form.

Normally, persons included on an application form must be members of the applicant's immediate family who usually reside, or could be reasonably expected to reside with the applicant. Any other person or persons will only be considered as eligible in circumstances in which it is reasonable for that person or persons to live with the applicant. This will normally exclude lodgers or anyone subletting from the applicant.

Applicants accepted onto the Register will receive written information, which will include a registration number, the number of points they have been allocated and the size of accommodation they are assessed for.

Only 1 application will be accepted per person at any one time.

9.13 Renewal of Applications

Applicants will be invited to re-register their applications on a regular basis. Failure to respond to a reminder will result in the application being cancelled and the applicant being removed from the Housing Register. Subsequent applications will be dealt with as fresh applications and the points assessed on that basis.

9.14 Removal/Amendment to entry on register

The council may remove a person from its register at any time on the grounds that the applicant is ineligible or disqualified. The council can also amend a person's entry and remove a person if he/she requests it (provided they are not owed a duty as homeless).

Where an applicant is refused access to the housing register or removed from it other than at his request, the council will inform him in writing of its decision, the reason for it and the right to request a review.

Subsequent applications will be dealt with as fresh applications and the points assessed on that basis.

9.15 Change of Circumstances

Change of circumstances should be notified to the Housing Operations Division as soon as possible, using the Change of Circumstances Form. The form should be fully completed and be used for the following:

- A change of address
- Any additions to the family or confirmed pregnancy
- Any member of the family or any other person on the application who has left the accommodation
- Any change in income or savings
- Changes in status of accommodation (e.g. Notice to Quit)

In cases where there is a change in an applicant's welfare or medical situation then a new Housing Welfare/Social Grounds form or a Medical Self-Assessment form should be completed.

10. Access to Information

10.13 The right to advice and information

Section 166 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, requires a housing authority to ensure advice and information is available free to everyone in its district about the right to apply for housing accommodation.

Section 166 requires housing authorities to inform an applicant he has the right to certain general information, such as:

- Information that will enable him to assess how his application is likely to be treated under the scheme, and in particular, whether he is likely to fall within the reasonable preference categories; and
- Information about whether accommodation appropriate to his needs is likely to be made available and, if so, how long it is likely to be before such accommodation becomes available.

The Housing Provision Team offers a telephone service to the public from Monday to Friday between the hours of 9 am to 5.00 pm. The team deals with numerous enquiries and includes the following:

- The right to apply for housing
- The different types of housing options available
- Information about the Allocations Policy and procedures
- Information on how applications are being treated
- Information on the likelihood of accommodation being provided and how long approximately this may take

The team also responds to written requests for information (including those mentioned above). Reasonable requests for information via email are also responded to.

A duty officer is available each weekday, except Wednesday morning, to give advice and information to applicants in person who visit the Civic Centre. Assistance will also be provided to help with the completion of housing register application forms, and other forms for medical/disability and welfare/social needs for example.

If it is not possible for applicants to attend the Civic Centre for any reason, home visits will be arranged.

The Applying for Housing leaflet is widely available and is automatically given to applicants who request a housing register application form. The leaflet advises that if further information is sought, applicants can contact the Housing Provision Team for assistance.

Further information will be uploaded onto the Council's website www.richmond.gov.uk

10.14 The right to information about decisions and the right to review a decision

Applicants will be notified in writing of decisions taken on their application.

The notification will give clear grounds for the decision, which are based firmly on the relevant facts of the case.

An applicant also has the right, on request, to be informed of any decision about the facts of the applicant's case which has been, or is likely to be, taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to him.

Any request for a review must be made within 21 days of the person being informed in writing of the council's decision. A request for a review can be made in writing to the Team Leader, Housing Provision at the Civic Centre. The applicant will be invited to submit any new information they would like the reviewing officer to consider.

Applicants have a right to request a review of the following decisions:

- To treat an applicant as ineligible due to immigration status or persons from abroad who have failed the habitual residence test.
- .
- That an applicant is disqualified or suspended.
- Not to make an allocation to an applicant, when it has been considered he would not be capable of independent living.
- Any decision about the facts of the applicant's case which has been, or is likely to be, taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to him

A person will be notified in writing of the outcome of a review, with details of the reasons for the decision.

10.3 Refusal of an offer and right to review on suitability

Applicants are notified in writing that they have been nominated for a permanent offer. Applicants are advised that the council have fully considered their needs and believe it to be a final, suitable offer.

Information is provided to explain how to refuse an offer, how the council will deal with this refusal and about the review process. Applicants are also notified about the consequences of the offer being considered suitable at the review stage.

The applicant will receive an offer letter from the relevant registered social landlord following a nomination to the landlord from the council.

All applicants are given an opportunity to view the offered property prior to their decision whether or not to accept a tenancy. If an applicant does not respond promptly to an invitation from the relevant landlord to view the property, then the council may consider this to be a refusal of the offer.

Tenancies between partners are normally offered in joint names.

Tenancies are created by the prospective tenant(s) signing a tenancy agreement.

Having viewed the offered property, the applicant will be given a deadline, normally 48 hours, to decide whether to accept the offer. Should the applicant wish to refuse the property, they will usually complete a refusal form, detailing their reasons.

As stated below, this refusal will not be treated as a final, irreversible refusal. However, applicants are warned of the need to take steps to obtain any advice that they may require in order to reach their final decision by this stage in the procedure. If applicants have difficulty completing this form, Housing Officers will assist them. The council will consider the reasons for refusal along with any supporting evidence.

If further medical information is provided, the council's Medical Adviser will assess this. The council will then reconsider the suitability of the offer in light of the new information and recommendations from the Medical Adviser.

If the council consider the reasons for refusal to be justified, and therefore the offer unsuitable for the applicant's needs, the offer will be withdrawn and the applicant will be nominated for a further offer in due course. The applicant will be notified in writing of this decision.

Should the offer be confirmed as suitable for the applicant's needs, then the offer will be enforced. This decision will be notified in writing to the applicant, giving reasons.

The applicant will be given another opportunity to accept the offer. All applicants should be aware that a decision to refuse an offer at this stage is final. The offer will not be kept open during the period allowed for requesting a review of its suitability or pending the review, if requested, and the opportunity to accept the offer will be lost.

Applicants will ordinarily be given 48 hours following notification of the enforcement decision, during which to notify the council that they accept the offer, failing which the council will treat the offer as having been refused.

The council's view is that this period, particularly in the context of the total period of time allowed from the date of the offer letter, will ordinarily constitute a reasonable period of time for an applicant to make up their mind whether or not to accept the offer.

The council may extend this period in exceptional cases, for example, where the applicant is especially vulnerable. However, applicants should be aware that in assessing any such request the council will also take into account the wider interests at stake, including the need to make the best use of the scarce resources of the relevant landlord.

Any request for an extension of this period should be made before the 48-hour period expires. The letter will also advise that there is a right to request a review of the suitability of the offer.

The officer normally making the decision on the enforcement of the offer is the Team Leader, Housing Provision. An Officer of appropriate seniority would carry out any review of the suitability of the offer.

10.3.1 Applicants owed a Homelessness Duty under Part VII

Applicants owed a duty under Part VII of the 1996 Act, are advised they have 21 days from the date they were notified of the council's decision, to request a review.

Applicants are advised they can accept the offer and at the same time, request a review on its suitability. Applicants will be encouraged to take up this option,

to ensure that if they lose their appeal they will still have accommodation available to them.

From the date the applicant requests a review, they have a further seven days to provide any further information. If there are mitigating circumstances, an extension to this time limit will be provided.

All information held on file, together with any new information will be carefully considered at review. The reviewing officer will notify the applicant in writing of the decision. If the offer is considered unsuitable, the offer will be withdrawn and the applicant will receive another offer.

If the offer is considered reasonable and suitable and the applicant has accepted it, the statutory housing duty will be discharged for the time being and the applicant will remain in the property.

Where the offer has been refused, the duty will cease and, where appropriate, temporary accommodation withdrawn. The rehousing application will be cancelled. The applicant may reapply at any stage, but save in exceptional cases will not be registered for rehousing for a period of two years after the date the duty was discharged.

The applicant will be advised that if they disagree with the review decision, they can appeal to the County Court on a point on law.

If an applicant refuses the offer but does not request a review of the suitability of the offer, the statutory housing duty will cease and, where appropriate, temporary accommodation will be withdrawn.

10.3.2 Applicants who applied directly to the Housing Register under Part VI

These applicants are informed they have seven days from the date they were notified of the council's decision to enforce the offer, to request a review. They then have a further seven days to provide any supporting information. In mitigating circumstances, this time limit can be extended.

The reviewing offer will consider all information and inform the applicant in writing of the review decision. If the offer is considered suitable, the application will be cancelled. The applicant may reapply at any stage, but save in exceptional cases will not be registered for rehousing for a period of two years after the date the duty was discharged.

11 Quotas

11.1 General

Under Section 166A of the 1996 Act, local authorities have to give a reasonable preference to certain categories of people, but this does not have to be through a single criterion. Quotas have been established to ensure people with particular housing requirements can be prioritised.

For all the quotas, nominations need to be made using the Richmond Housing Register Quota Referral form, which should be fully completed. In all cases additional information will need to be supplied to support the referral, including local connection. The decision to accept the nomination is made by the Team Leader, Housing Provision. If a nomination is declined, this will be put in writing to the referring agency, with the reasons for the decision.

The number of accepted referrals can vary each year according to the availability of property. Negotiations take place annually between the Housing Operations Division and the agencies involved. Current arrangements exist with the following organisations:

- People with Learning Disability Team, Social Services for the referral of people with learning disabilities
- SPEAR for the referral of rough sleepers and persons from the Spear Accommodation Scheme
- Stonham Housing Association for the referral of ex-offenders
- Look Ahead Housing & Care for the referral of ex-offenders and persons who have a history of drug and/or alcohol misuse, to enable move-on from a floating support scheme
- Leaving Care Team, Social Services, for the referral of young people leaving care
- Mental Health to enable move-on from a floating support scheme.
- Ex members of the regular armed services for either single people or families who have been recently discharged
- Foster Carers for households who foster children on behalf of London Borough of Richmond and need housing to make the fostering tenable.
- Key Worker Schemes. The borough operates a scheme and there is also a scheme managed by Richmond Housing Partnership who should be contacted directly.

To join the RHP waiting list, please contact RHP's Voids and Lettings Team on 0800 0322 433 or email voids&lettingsteam@rhp.org.uk

Or write to:

Richmond Housing Partnership
8 Waldergrave Road
Teddington
TW11 8GT

11.2 People with Physical Disabilities

Whilst there is no actual quota, it is a matter of policy that properties that have already been adapted to accommodate applicants with physical disabilities will, in the first instance, be considered for allocation to customers with physical disabilities. These applicants will be held on a sub-register of the housing register. This will include customers where the Medical Adviser had indicated that their condition will deteriorate, necessitating future adaptations. This policy is designed not only to address the needs of people with physical disabilities, but also to make the best use of existing stock. Customers with physical disabilities will not be considered only for adapted accommodation. They will also be considered for non-adapted accommodation, where it is possible to obtain adaptations.

12 Retirement Housing

The route to Retirement Housing is via the Housing Register and applicants are assessed initially in accordance with the points scheme.

All applicants, including partners, should be aged 60 or over. However in exceptional circumstances, applicants who are younger may be considered if they are particularly vulnerable.

An applicant's housing need is assessed through the Housing Register in the usual way. In addition, an Application Form for Retirement Housing Referral also need to be completed by a Housing Officer with the applicant, to fully establish the person's housing needs.

If the applicant has applied directly to the Housing Register, the Team Leader Housing Provision, will consider all the information to decide whether the applicant is capable of independent living with or without a care package and appropriate for sheltered housing. If the applicant has applied under Part VII of the Act, the Housing Options Manager will make this decision.

If the applicant is not considered suitable for retirement housing, they will be notified in writing, giving detail of the information considered and the reasons for the decision.

If the applicant has been approved for retirement housing, their application will be made active on the Housing Register and then nominated for a suitable offer in the usual way.

13 Specialist Housing Schemes

Various panels have been set up to consider referrals for specialist housing schemes.

13.1 Extra Care Housing Joint Assessment Panel

The panel meets on a regular basis and consists of representatives from Housing Operations, Housing Provider and Adult Services

To apply, the applicant needs to be on the Housing Register and to have had their needs assessed by Social Services. Care Managers need to provide a Social Work Specialist Assessment and care plan, which will be considered by the panel.

The panel will nominate applicants to the scheme on the basis of the selection criteria and the scheme's aims and objectives. Consideration will also be given to the applicant's current circumstances, the strength of their local connection to the borough and level of points on the housing register.

Applicants considered suitable for the scheme will be nominated to a Registered Social Landlord, who will arrange the tenancy sign up.

13.2 Mental Health Joint Assessment Panel

The Panel meets on a monthly basis with representation from Housing Operations, Housing Providers and Mental Health Professionals.

The panel considers applications for mental health floating support schemes within the borough. The Housing providers offer housing related support, whilst other support is provided by the relevant CMHT and other agencies. The level

of support provided at the schemes vary, but generally most are low level support schemes.

13.3 People with Learning Disabilities Joint Assessment Panels

There are various schemes for these customers. Current details are published on the Council's website www.richmond.gov.uk.

14 Sponsored Moves

This scheme is intended to offer the tenants of Registered Social Landlords who under-occupy their property, the opportunity to transfer to accommodation more suited to their needs. A financial inducement of £2,500 per bedroom released by the move is offered, plus assistance with removal expenses (removal vehicles, minor improvements to the property). For more information, refer to the Council's website www.richmond.gov.uk or contact the Housing Provision section on (020) 8891 7497. When approved, such cases are considered to be special category cases and are awarded 1000 points.

The Council then has nomination rights to the resultant void due to the sponsored move. The nomination is in addition to the 75% nomination rights to true voids.

15 Home Ownership Initiatives

Regular fairs are held to make customers aware of current schemes. Details of current schemes are publicised on the Council's website www.richmond.gov.uk

16 Reciprocal Arrangements

A tenant of another authority or housing association may be nominated by that authority or housing association on a reciprocal basis. In return for re-housing a nominated tenant of the referring landlord, through the Richmond Housing Register the latter agrees to re-house a nominee wishing to move into their locality. The decision to enter into a reciprocal arrangement is made by the Team Leader, Housing Provision, and can be appealed to the Head of Housing Operations. Reciprocals are only entered into where there is a realistic chance of a two-way move being completed. It is operated on a "like for like basis" only. Due to the extremely limited supply of housing in the borough very few reciprocal moves are agreed.

17. Local Lettings Plans

The council works in partnership with housing associations to help build sustainable communities. This may be best achieved by the council participating in local letting plans from time to time.

With regards to new build developments, there is evidence to suggest that filling a new estate with 100% of the most needy and vulnerable households

may lead to management problems and could make it difficult to develop community cohesion.

Each local lettings plan has its own separate, detailed agreement. In practice, the council allocates to a proportion of new build properties, usually 55 %, and the housing association nominates to the remaining properties. The housing associations select the nominees by advertising to current local housing association tenants who have conducted their tenancy well and are in employment. Once these housing association tenants move into the new development, the council allocates to all the resulting empty properties or alternative properties as appropriate.

Local lettings plans can also be developed for existing estates where there have been management problems. This could be achieved by the housing association wanting to allocate to more than their 25% share of properties on the estate. In return the council would be allowed to nominate to more than the 75% share of properties elsewhere. This would have to be on a reciprocal basis, so that the council did not lose out on properties of various sizes and standards.

The Head of Housing Operations will decide whether the council should participate in local lettings plans.

18. Contractual Rights to Housing and Tied Accommodation

The council has contractual duties to staff, where staff have tied accommodation, and there is a right to rehousing through their contract of employment with the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The council will make an offer through the Housing Allocations Policy to these staff when they retire. These former members of the council's staff will not be required to accrue points or present themselves as homeless, but will still need to complete a housing register application form. A Housing Needs Officer will then complete a Housing Visit Form with them, to fully establish their housing needs. The accommodation offered will be dependent upon the households size and not a "like for like" equivalent with their existing property.

19. Pan London Mobility Scheme

The Mayor of London is committed to making it easier for existing social housing tenants to move homes. A scheme is being developed where 5% of lettings available to a Local Authority are put into a pot for tenants outside of the borough to bid through a choice based lettings scheme. Similarly, Richmond tenants wishing to move out of the borough can join the scheme.

Other opportunities for applicants wishing to move to another area are dependent on what scheme is currently running. Existing Housing Association tenants should contact the landlord to discuss what schemes they have. This could be a transfer or a mutual exchange.

Applicants to the Housing Register should check the Council's website www.richmond.gov.uk for current schemes.

20. Exceptional Allocations

There will be occasions, from time to time, when the housing allocations policy does not cater for all applicants' circumstances or the council may have a pressing reason to move a household. Some applicants may be considered to be in exceptional need and the points system may not fully reflect the urgency of their situation, for example an applicant who is terminally ill and needs to be moved quickly to more suitable accommodation.

In such cases, the Head of Housing Operations will decide whether an exceptional allocation can be requested. If agreed, a form (Delegated Authority: Exceptional Allocations of Housing) is then completed. The Director of Adult and Community Services then makes the final decision on whether the allocation can go ahead.

Part III The Operation of the Allocations Policy

1 General Matters

In order to ensure that the council is seen to be treating all applicants fairly, any application for housing from Members of the council, employees of the council or associated persons must be disclosed. The term "associated person" is as defined under Section 178 of the 1996 Act.

2 One Suitable Offer Only

The Council has a responsibility to make the best use of the housing made available through housing associations and Registered Providers in the borough, hence the policy to nominate applicants for only one suitable, offer of permanent accommodation. This applies to all applicants on the Housing Register.

The offer must be considered reasonable and one which is suitable to meet the housing needs and medical/social needs of the applicants and their household. All offers of accommodation will be made following nominations to Housing Association with whom we have a nomination agreement, or to properties in the private rented sector. The council does not have any housing stock of its own.

3 Affordable Rent

There have always been differentials in the rent charged by Housing Associations. This has normally been based on the size of the property or its age or location. From 2012 the Affordable Rent programme has been introduced by some Registered Providers whereby they can charge up to 80% of market rent to the tenant.

Allocations to new Affordable rents properties will be to those at the top of the housing register in the same way as for other properties at lower rents.

4. Opportunity to express preferences in rehousing

Applicants are given the opportunity to express their preferences in where they would like to be permanently re-housed. Although these preferences will be carefully considered, it may not always be possible to provide accommodation within applicants' preferred areas. This is due to the limited supply of housing available to the council.

The areas of choice have been split into five geographical areas and applicants asked to place the areas into order of preference, with one being the most preferred.

The areas are as follows:

Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5
Hanworth Hounslow Whitton	Hampton Hill Hampton North Hampton	Barnes Mortlake Sheen	Twickenham Teddington Hampton Wick	Richmond Kew Ham Petersham

It is not possible for applicants to exclude parts of an area, unless there are exceptional circumstances and Senior Officers have agreed these. Therefore, if an applicant is not willing to live in part of an area then this area should be ranked as a low preference.

An attempt will be made to nominate an applicant to accommodation within their top 3 areas. Applicants who are at the points level threshold or above will only be considered for a nomination. The applicant with the highest level of points, regardless of whether they had ranked the area as first, second or third is nominated for a reasonable offer.

The Council reserves the right to make an offer of accommodation outside a customer's area of choice, including out of the borough.

With respect to mitigating circumstances regarding re-housing in a particular area, the following should be regarded as examples rather than an exhaustive list:

- Accessibility to schools for children due to take GCSE or A Level exams;
- The need to attend a special school;
- Employment factors e.g. shift/transport issues;
- Hospitals/GPs where specialist services are provided or transportation cannot be arranged;
- Trauma;
- Domestic abuse;
- Harassment;
- Need to be near carers.

Evidence supporting reasons for either favouring or refusing a particular location will be required to support the restriction of an applicant's re-housing areas.

The size of accommodation offered has been detailed earlier in the policy

The medical/disability and social needs of the applicant will be considered when allocating the type i.e. house/flat/maisonette and floor level of accommodation. Households with medical priority or a disability will be considered for lower level accommodation. Where no recognised need has been identified, any type and level of accommodation may be offered.

The request for a property with central heating will only be considered when approved on medical grounds by the council's Medical Adviser.

The provision of a garden will not be considered essential except on the recommendation of the Medical Adviser.

Each Registered Social Landlord has its own policy with regards what pets are allowed. Guide dogs or hearing dogs are generally exempt.

Subject to availability, single applicants will be considered for either studio or one-bed accommodation. A studio is considered adequate unless the Medical Adviser, Team Leader Housing Provision, or Housing Options Manager have confirmed that one bedroom accommodation is necessary. This does not apply to people who have been accepted onto the Sponsored Moves Scheme, where there is a resultant vacancy of family accommodation.

Each Registered Provider has its own policy but prospective tenants who are under 18 may be required to provide a guarantor who will sign the tenancy on their behalf, and provide an undertaking to pay the rent and abide by the conditions of the tenancy agreement.

5. Registered Social Landlords

The council is committed to working in partnership with housing associations and registered social landlords and has nomination rights to a proportion of their accommodation, which becomes available for letting. The council does not own any housing stock.

Applicants on the Housing Register will be considered for properties of all registered social landlords who participate in the Common Housing Register or with whom the Council has nomination rights.

6. Equal Opportunities and Monitoring

The council will seek to ensure that its allocation policies are being operated in accordance with its equal opportunities policy (available from council offices).

All applicants will be asked to complete the Monitoring section of the application form.

The Allocations Policy will be operated with due regard to the Council's duties under the Equalities Act.

7. Access to Information

All application forms, leaflets and standard letters inform applicants they are able to receive the information in Braille, put onto audio tape or in another language.

If it is known that an applicant requires information in any of the above formats, letters will be communicated in this manner.

If an applicant requires an interpreter, a signer or use of a minicom system, this will be arranged.

8. Complaints

All applicants have the right to be treated fairly and properly. Complaints will be dealt with as per the Council's Complaints Procedure.