

Home-Link Lettings Policy consultation August/September 2015

Members of the public and Home-Link applicants were consulted on the key Lettings Policy changes via a questionnaire at the Annex listed below. The consultation was advertised on the Home-Link website and all Home-Link applicants were sent an email encouraging them to respond to the consultation. Table 1 below provides a summary of the responses received.

Table 1: Summary of responses from members of the general public and housing applicants

Proposed change	Number of respondents	Number in favour	Number against	Most prevalent comments from those not in favour	Actions/further amendments
Discounting those subject to immigration control as household members	57	53*	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will cause overcrowding and is unfair • Cases should be treated individually rather than having a blanket rule • A blunt instrument to deal with potential exploitation of the rules • It will lead to unintended consequences 	
Amendment to clause for those deemed to have worsened their housing circumstances to gain an advantage on the housing register	56	48*	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People may be forced to move to smaller properties for financial reasons • People should not be penalised for well-intended mistakes • People with medical issues may move for good reason even if it technically 'worsens their circumstances' • People may move to a less suitable property to avoid homelessness • Worsening circumstances is a subjective assessment • Does not allow for sufficient discretion 	
Proposed sanction for band A applicants who refuse more than 3	57	50	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes adverts are not clear enough 	

Proposed change	Number of respondents	Number in favour	Number against	Most prevalent comments from those not in favour	Actions/further amendments
offers of accommodation				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a choice based system and people should not be forced to accept offers that are not right • Unfair and unreasonable • Proposed change is too vague on when this should apply 	
Offer 'emergency housing status' to terminally ill applicants who are already in band A	57	53	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reason to award additional priority as housing requirement is temporary 	

*One respondent qualified the 'yes' vote by saying that this change should only apply to new applicants

Home-Link Registered Providers (RPs) and partner local authorities that sit on Home-Link Operations Group and Home-Link Management Board (HLMB) have been formally consulted throughout the process. Partners represented on these groups include the following:

- St Edmundsbury Borough Council
- Forest Heath District Council
- East Cambridgeshire District Council
- Fenland District Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Cambridge City Council
- CHS Group
- Sanctuary
- Circle Anglia
- Havebury
- Luminus
- Axiom
- Jephson
- Aldwyck
- Cotman
- Cross Keys

- Flagship
- Guinness
- Hanover
- Hastoe
- Hyde
- Longhurst
- Orwell
- Paradigm
- Riverside English Churches Housing Group
- Stonewater (formerly Raglan)
- Accent Nene
- Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association
- Broadland
- Circle Housing Wherry
- Home Group
- Hundred Houses
- King Street
- Metropolitan
- Muir
- Orbit
- Papworth Trust
- Suffolk Housing

Home-Link RPs and partner local authorities were also consulted on the key proposed changes via the questionnaire listed below. There were 10 respondents to the questionnaire from this group. These were Havebury, Luminus, Circle Housing Wherry, Hundred Houses, Riverside ECHG, Flagship Homes, Kings Street Housing Society, Wintercomfort, Cambridge Women’s Aid and Suffolk Housing and a summary of the responses is listed within table 2 below:

Table 2: Summary of responses from Home-Link partners

Proposed change	Number of respondents	Number in favour	Number against	Most prevalent comments from those not in favour	Actions/further amendments
Discounting those subject to immigration control as household members	10	10			

Proposed change	Number of respondents	Number in favour	Number against	Most prevalent comments from those not in favour	Actions/further amendments
Amendment to clause for those deemed to have worsened their housing circumstances to gain an advantage on the housing register	10	8	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be special exemptions for medical cases where appropriate • Should be able to demonstrate an intent to worsen circumstances before penalising 	
Proposed sanction for band A applicants who refuse more than 3 offers of accommodation	10	9	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants should be downgraded to a lower band rather than suspended 	
Offer 'emergency housing status' to terminally ill applicants who are already in band A	10	9	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority date should be backdated rather than emergency housing status awarded 	

Annex – consultation questionnaire

1. It is proposed that people who are applying to join the register cannot include those who are subject to immigration control as members of their household. We are doing this because allowing housing applicants to add these individuals may favourably affect the priority we would give them and the number of bedrooms they would be entitled to and, it is felt that this is fair and reasonable given that housing is in short supply in the district.

Do you agree with this change?

Yes

No

If not, please state why below:

2. There is provision in the policy to ensure that housing applicants who have made their own circumstances worse should not get additional priority as a result. We have changed the policy slightly to ensure that applicants do not need to have known the policy before taking the action that they have to 'worsen their circumstances'.

Examples where applicants may be considered to have 'worsened their circumstances' are:

- *Deliberately overcrowding your own home*
- *moving to a smaller property which is inadequate for your family size*
- *selling a property and spending the proceeds without securing alternative housing*
- *moving to a property clearly unsuitable for the medical needs of an applicant or household member.*

Do you agree that applicants should not benefit under the lettings policy regardless of whether they knew the way the Council prioritises applications on the register?

Yes

No

If not, please state why below:

3. The Council has proposed that housing applicants in the highest priority group (band A) on the register have their applications suspended if they refuse 3 offers of accommodation. This change is recommended because band A is considered to be an 'urgent' housing status and regular refusal of accommodation offers may call this into question. This provision would be at the discretion of the Council and not automatic.

Do you agree that applications in band A who reject more than 3 offers of accommodation should have their applications suspended for 6 months in certain circumstances?

Yes

No

If not, please state why below:

4. There is a proposal within the revised lettings policy to prioritise people who are in band A and are terminally ill above all others in band A and give them an 'emergency status'. This is because the date a banding priority is awarded determines which bid for accommodation finishes highest. People who are terminally ill do not have the luxury of time to wait for their priority date to become a significant factor in the bidding process.

Do you agree that people who are terminally ill and are already in the highest band should be given this extra level of priority over others also in urgent housing need?

Yes

No

If not, please state why below: