

Current housing register applicants - Frequently Asked Questions

Key Issue 1 – Housing Register Qualification Criteria

1. **Who can join the housing register?**

Anyone who needs help can join the housing register except applicants who fall into the groups below:

- People whose behaviour makes them unacceptable to us
- People we have previously removed from our register
- Tenants who have signed up to a new tenancy in the last 12 months through Durham Key Options and who are regarded as adequately housed

2. **I have been accepted onto the housing register, but I live outside of County Durham and don't have a local connection, what are the chances of being allocated a property?**

We adhere to government guidance that aims to ensure people with a long-standing connection to their local community get higher priority for council homes. Those with a well-established residency history, relatives or a job in the local area should benefit first when social homes become available. This is called a 'local connection'.

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

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

Durham Key Options Partners can deal with individual cases with some discretion if there are exceptional circumstances, including hard-to-let housing. So, if a property has been hard to let and we have already advertised it at least once, partners may let it directly to an interested applicant to avoid the further cost of keeping the property empty. This applicant need not have lived in the north-east region for one year or have a local connection to County Durham. However, because of the housing crisis, we now have very few empty properties.

We are currently seeking views on qualification criteria for the housing register, including for those living outside of County Durham. We would welcome your views on this.

3. **I live outside of County Durham, I do however need to move closer to my family who live within County Durham, for support. Will this be considered under the criteria of having a local connection?**

Support from family can include, but is not limited to, physical support, emotional support, specific support, a support network provided by the family.

We are currently seeking views on qualification criteria including those requiring family support who live in the area and would welcome your views on this.

4. If I don't need a residency test, due to exemptions, what priority would be given to me on the housing register?

A housing assessment would be carried out to determine housing need and priority. At present, care leavers, domestic abuse victims and connection to armed forces in urgent medical need are allocated Band 1. Domestic abuse victims and armed forces without urgent medical need and reserve forces connection are allocated Band 2.

We are currently seeking views on the allocations policy, including exemptions and would welcome your views on this.

5. Why is the Council seeking views on the potential removal of Band 4?

We are seeking views on many aspects of the allocations policy, including the potential removal of Band 4. There is a shortage of social housing available across County Durham. This is due to a lower turnover of properties and an increased demand as more people are finding the private rented sector more expensive and unaffordable and more people are joining the housing register.

Band 4 has the largest number of people in it (47% of people on our housing register are in Band 4) but in reality, most of those applicants will not be offered a home as they are assessed as already adequately housed. Only 6% of those in Band 4 were allocated a house in the last year.

In this time of housing crisis, we are therefore considering removing Band 4 to ensure that we make best use of our properties and those people with the highest priority of housing need are able to access social housing.

6. What will happen to me if I am in Band 4 and this Band is removed?

This has not been decided yet. We are in the first phase of consultation and as part of this, we are seeking views on a proposal to review this policy, including the removal of band 4. We would welcome your views on this. If this proposal is taken forward to the second phase of consultation, we will consult with everyone on the register again.

7. Why is the Council proposing to review what they mean by unacceptable behaviour?

The council feel that the definition of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour should be reviewed and welcomes the views of consultees.

Key issue 2 – Better Use of Social Housing Stock

8. Will I be forced to downsize?

No, the purpose of the consultation on downsizing is to explore any opportunities to support those people who may wish to downsize but may not be aware that they can, or may not know how to go about downsizing into a more suitable home.

9. If I downsize, will there be more housing stock in the upcoming future for me to move into?

We are doing everything we can to tackle the housing crisis and are working closely in partnership with our partner Housing Associations to enable the delivery of as many suitable affordable homes as possible.

Key issue 3 – Local Letting Policies

10. What is the difference between the countywide Social Housing Allocations Policy and a Local Lettings Policy (LLP)?

The Social Housing Allocations Policy is a county wide policy to determine the priorities that will be followed when allocating social housing.

A Local Lettings Policy covers smaller areas or developments to address issues specific to that area and addresses the needs of those residents to ensure that the community is balanced.

11. Are there any further LLPs being developed in County Durham?

There are currently no further LLPs agreed at present, although this may change in the future.

Key issue 4 – Priority of Homeless Cases

12. Why is the Council seeking views on the priority of homeless cases?

Locally, the council has recently adopted a new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy with a vision to eradicate homelessness and rough sleeping. The council feels we should prioritise prevention of homelessness in the first place so that those who are at risk of becoming homeless don't end up in temporary accommodation or rough sleeping. It will help reduce rough sleeping and improve chances of a positive future, stopping people from becoming trapped in a cycle of homelessness.

13. If people in Temporary Accommodation (TA) have a higher priority how would this affect other people trying to get social housing in Band 1?

This change won't impact most people as the numbers of people in TA are relatively low. The council are also seeking to build and acquire more properties to house people who require TA. Band 1 applicants will continue to have the highest priority to move.

Key Issue 5 – Priority of Medical and Domestic Abuse Cases

14. I am currently in Band 2 due to medical reasons, how would any changes to the policy affect my application?

Any changes made to the policy that would affect your application would be communicated to you with the reasons why. Any applicant needing to move due to medical reasons would be placed in the most appropriate band based on housing need and personal circumstances.

15. Why are the council seeking views on giving victims of domestic abuse greater priority than someone with other welfare needs?

We are seeking views on the priority of domestic abuse cases and would welcome your input. Victims of domestic abuse often need to be re housed as quickly as possible depending upon their current circumstances. Providing these applicants with a higher priority would enable suitable housing to be sourced more quickly and avoid or reduce the length of stay in temporary accommodation.

General

16. **Why are you reviewing the allocations policy now?**

Now, out of the 4 Bands, 88% of houses go to those in Band 1 and Band 2. As part of this review, we want to ensure those people most in need are being housed in homes that best meet their needs. At the same time, we need to ensure the policy enables mixed and balanced communities for our residents. This means that we need to ensure that communities thrive and remain places where people want to live.

Much has changed since the existing joint allocations policy was reviewed and adopted in 2017 following a full public consultation exercise. The main things we want to do is make sure the scheme is fair and realistic.

We are making changes now because we want to help our residents in this time of housing crisis.

17. **Will I be informed if I am going to be removed from the Housing Register?**

Yes, all applicants will be notified if any significant changes are made to the allocations policy, including removal from the housing register and reasons why the changes are being made.

18. **What will happen to my data if I am removed?**

All data will be dealt with according to our General Data Protection policies and protocols.

19. **What happens next?**

We will review and analyse the data received from the first phase of the consultation. All feedback will be taken into consideration before making any changes to the allocations policy. A draft allocations policy will be shared as part of a second phase of consultation in 2025.

20. **How long is this consultation going to run for?**

The consultation will start 15 January to 12 March 2025 for an 8-week period.

21. **How do I get involved?**

- Fill in the online survey at www.letstalkcountydurham.co.uk
- Attend one of our online public sessions or an Area Action Partnership (AAP) meeting – dates and details at www.letstalkcountydurham.co.uk
- Attend a tenants' meeting organised by the housing providers - contact your provider for details.

22. **Where can I get a printed copy of the consultation questions if I can't get online?**

Online at: www.letstalkcountydurham.co.uk or, pick up a printed copy from a Durham County Council library or customer access point.

23. **Where can I get a copy of the current allocations policy?**

You can get a copy of the Allocation Policy by e-mailing choicebasedlettings@durham.gov.uk

24. **Will my feedback be confidential?**

Yes, all feedback is confidential. We do encourage you to register your details so that we can keep you informed of progress with the housing allocations consultation and development of the new policy. Any personally identifiable details you provide when registering will be separated from your response when we come to complete the consultation analysis.

25. **Further questions or concerns**

If you have any further queries about the consultation, please email choicebasedlettings@durham.gov.uk or, if you have no digital access, telephone our customer services team on 03000 26 0000 and we will put you in touch with someone from the housing team.