

Runnymede Borough Council

**Consultation on proposed changes to
Runnymede Borough Council's Housing
Allocations Scheme**

November 2024

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Introduction & Background

Social housing is provided by Councils and Housing Associations and provides a safe and stable home for those people who genuinely need it. Runnymede Council is committed to developing and supporting the development of new social homes, however with over 1,000 households on our housing register and approximately 200 properties to let each year, the demand for housing will continue to be greater than available supply.

The Scheme sets out who is eligible for social housing in accordance with the legislation and who qualifies to be considered for it within Runnymede. It explains the procedure for joining the housing register, such as completing an online application form and providing supporting documents. It shows how individual needs will be assessed and what relative priority their application will be given. The current Allocations scheme can be viewed [here](#).

Runnymede's current Allocations Scheme was adopted in 2021. Given the increasing demands for social housing, this is a sensible time to review the existing scheme. We are consulting on the proposed changes to our Allocations Scheme to ensure that current and future social housing is allocated to those in the greatest housing need.

We are proposing to make some changes to the Scheme and we want to hear your views.

Overview of proposed changes

Runnymede Council are proposing a number of changes to the current Allocations Scheme. There has been significant socio-economic change in the UK since then and so the Council believes it is now time to undertake a review of the current Scheme to make sure that it is lawful, and that social housing is offered to those with the highest housing needs. The scheme must ensure that those in the greatest need are prioritised to ensure that they have the best chance of being offered social housing in the future.

Proposal one: Local connection criteria - clarify our qualification criteria by making it clear that local connection can be obtained through residence through a family member who has lived in the borough for the last 5 years and that the individual has a health/welfare need

It is important that an Allocations Scheme is clear and transparent. We feel that there is room for improvement to achieve this aim. Therefore, we propose to clarify that one of the Ways that local connection can be demonstrated in circumstances where there is a family member (adult mother, father, brother, sister, or child over 18 years of age) who has lived Runnymede Borough for at least the past 5 consecutive years *and* there is a health/welfare need for the applicant to live in this Borough.

Proposal 2: Amend the retention of local connection for households who accept an offer of out of borough accommodation under the prevention duty for a period of three years rather than for the duration of the stay in that accommodation

Over the course of the last few years, the Council has not seen any individual apply for social housing where they have accepted an offer of accommodation outside of Runnymede in discharge of the 'Prevention duty'. This is a duty the Council has to assist someone who is threatened with homelessness within the next 56 days. We therefore consider it right to reduce the period of retaining local connection to 3 years. A period of 3 years has been chosen as that household would most likely have built up a sufficient period of continuous residency in the area that they currently live in order to join that area's housing register should they have a housing need.

Proposal 3: Extend the retention of local connection for households who accept an offer of out of borough accommodation under the relief and main housing duty

Whilst the Council will always do its utmost to secure alternative permanent accommodation for households experiencing homelessness within the Borough, on some occasions we are unable to do so. This is because of the relative high costs of living in the Borough as well as circumstances pertinent to the individual household, such as benefits being capped. In such cases, the only option to resolve homelessness is to secure accommodation outside of the Borough in more affordable areas. We think it is therefore only fair to extend the retention of local connection to those under a 'relief' or 'main housing duty' who accept an offer of accommodation to end their homelessness.

Where someone accepts an offer under a 'relief' duty, they will retain their local connection for one year. If a household owed a main housing duty accepts an offer of accommodation made under that duty, they will retain local connection for 2 years. A different period for both duties is being proposed because the household who had a 'main housing duty' is likely to still be owed that duty from the Council if they are threatened with or become homeless within two years of accepting an offer of private rented sector accommodation.

Proposal 4 Increasing the financial thresholds set for being able to join the Council's Housing Register

The Council is acutely aware of the challenges relating to the cost of living and being able to afford private rented sector accommodation. It is therefore considered appropriate to raise the threshold to which people are able to join the housing register. It is proposed that a single

applicant's 'take home pay' can be up to £35,000 before they are deemed ineligible to join the housing register. For couples this threshold figure is proposed to be £40,000 and for families it is £55,000.

Proposal 5 Reducing timeframe that someone is unable to join the Housing Register where:

a) fraud/deception in obtaining a tenancy has been detected and

b) in circumstances where someone has given up a social or private rented sector accommodation

This review also afforded an opportunity to examine the balance between deterring poor choices in behaviour and the length of time that a household is not allowed to join the housing register. For example, where a household obtained a tenancy by deception, it is proposed to reduce the disqualification period from 5 years to 2 years as this is considered a proportionate response to the activity and aligns it with other proposed changes to disqualification periods. For example, reducing the disqualification period from 5 years to 12 months for Applicants who have been served a formal warning or a notice due to breaching the terms of a tenancy, whether social housing or privately rented, within the past 12 months.

Other proposed changes to disqualification period includes reducing the time from 5 years to 3 years for those applicants who have given up their social housing tenancy, where this was not due to factors such as affordability or risk, within the last five years. This is considered a more proportionate response. However, our proposed change to reduce the ban from joining the housing register from 5 years to 3 years for social housing brought it in line with the current ban for giving up private rented sector accommodation. We consider it important to have a distinction in time frame for not allowing someone to join the housing register who has given up social housing as opposed to private rented sector. This is due to the scarcity of social housing and the severity of giving up a valuable and much sought after asset. Therefore, we propose to decrease the duration of time one is not allowed to join the housing register having given by their private rented sector accommodation from 3 years to 2 years.

Proposal 6 Revise the age of bedroom allocation from 16 years to 18 years

The need to balance the demand for additional bedroom allocations owing to a health need, with the scarce stock of social housing has led us to propose an increase in the age of bedroom allocation from 16 years to 18 years. This will enable better stock management.

Proposal 7 Revise the banding placements of homeless households owed the prevention, relief and main housing duty

The Council seeks to align the Allocations Scheme with the Housing Solutions service's ethos of prevention. It is therefore proposed to award a priority Band C to households who are threatened with homelessness in the next 56 days and award those who are actually homeless or where the Council has a main housing duty in Band D, whereby offers of social housing accommodation will be directly made by the Council. This will provide a clear incentive to work with the team at an earlier stage where there is more scope to undertake prevention work. It is therefore considered proportionate to propose this change so that the opportunity for successful preventative work is maximised, which will ultimately be beneficial for the household and avoid the potential use of temporary accommodation.

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