

**Waltham Forest Council - Accommodation Acquisitions Policy- April 2021**

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This document sets out the Council’s policy for the acquisition of privately owned properties for use as accommodation for households towards whom a duty to secure accommodation has been accepted under the Housing Act 1996.

1.2 This document should be read in conjunction with the Council’s Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Sector Offer Allocation Policies.

1.3 The Council does not have sufficient units of accommodation within its own owned and managed stock, and as a result we depend on the supply of privately owned properties to meet our obligations to provide accommodation to homeless households. Changes to the local housing market and other factors largely outside the Council’s control have made it increasingly difficult to obtain suitable properties, which meet the required standards, in the borough or in surrounding areas. This policy is intended to ensure that sufficient numbers of suitable properties are obtained for the anticipated demand for accommodation. The policy, and associated demand projections, will be reviewed periodically as required.

2.0 Key principles

2.1 The approach of the service to the acquisition of properties is informed by the following key principles:

* The objective of the service is to procure sufficient units of accommodation to meet the anticipated demand for properties in each financial year.
* Where possible these units will be in the borough (“Zone A”), however the service may acquire properties in a range of other locations where it appears the supply of units in the borough will not be sufficient for the anticipated demand.
* Where there is a shortfall in the number of `in borough’ units, the Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Sector Offer Allocation policies will be applied to determine which households are offered those units and which households will be offered properties in other locations.
* In addressing the shortfall the service will endeavour to acquire units in locations which are close to Waltham Forest in order to minimise, as far as possible, the distance between the borough itself and the location of accommodation being offered to households who cannot be accommodated within the borough. These `nearby locations’ are Greater London and neighbouring districts in Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire’ (“Zone B”).
* Where the demand for accommodation is such that it is unlikely to be possible to acquire sufficient properties for all homeless households in Waltham Forest and in nearby locations, the service may acquire properties in other locations (“Zone C”), which can be offered to homeless households applying the approach set out in the Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Sector Offer Policies.
* In making decisions on the acquisition of properties, the service may take into account the resources available for the provision of accommodation, the difficulties of procuring sufficient units of accommodation at affordable prices in the borough, and the practicalities of acquiring accommodation in nearby locations.

3.0 Accommodation provision – general

3.1 The Housing Solutions service currently provides as much accommodation as possible using properties which are already owned by the Council. These include a number of hostels and converted street properties, which are used as temporary accommodation and located in the borough, and vacant general needs units on regeneration estates.

3.2 It is not currently possible to envisage any circumstances where the number of households requiring accommodation would reduce to such an extent that the acquisition of privately owned properties is no longer required in order to fulfil the Council’s duties.

4.0 Anticipated demand for accommodation

4.1 The number of households requiring housing assistance is unlikely to reduce significantly in the near future for a range of reasons, including the limited supply of permanent accommodation and the continuing high level of homeless presentations by households with a local connection to the borough.

4.2 Given the level of demand it is certain that the service will not be able to meet the need for accommodation using only properties within the borough. There are also very severe challenges in acquiring properties in nearby locations, most of which are experiencing steeply rising property prices, increasing private sector rents, and other trends the effect of which is to reduce the number of properties in the borough or in nearby locations which may become available for use by the Council.

4.3 On this basis the acquisitions policy assumes that it will be necessary to procure properties in a range of locations beyond the borough itself and nearby locations. All properties procured under the policy will be as close to the borough as is reasonably practicable, given the financial constraints within which the service operates and the practical difficulties which can prevent units being procured in the borough or nearby locations.

5.0 Instructions to suppliers

5.1 As the procurement of individual properties is vested in the suppliers and landlords working on the service’s behalf, the service must ensure that the suppliers’ actions are compliant with the acquisitions policy.

5.2 The decision whether to use a particular property which is being offered by a supplier is made by the service and must be informed by applying the key principles of the acquisitions policy.

5.3 The suppliers who procure accommodation on the service’s behalf are made aware of the Council’s requirements and of this policy.

5.4 Suppliers are requested to procure as many properties as possible in the borough, to procure properties in nearby locations wherever possible, and to procure properties as close to the borough as possible when considering other areas.

5.5 Where it may be possible for suppliers to deliver cost-effective arrangements for accommodation in other areas, managers in the service are authorised to approve these arrangements where it appears clear that

1. On the basis of trends in supply and demand the service cannot be confident of comprehensively meeting its obligations to homeless households using only the properties likely to be acquired in the borough and in nearby locations (Zones A and B), and
2. It is likely there will also be a shortfall in the number of available units located in areas between the borough and nearby areas (Zones A and B) and the location of the potential acquisition and
3. The properties in question meet the physical standards set out in the Council’s specification for accommodation procurement, and
4. The properties being offered represent good value for money when considered in the context of the service’s overall expenditure on accommodation.

5.6 Where units are acquired in other areas by applying the above criteria, the Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Sector Offer Allocations Policies will be applied in the process of matching each individual property to a homeless household. Each property will only be offered to an applicant when the service has satisfied itself that it is suitable for the homeless household, taking account of the household’s individual circumstances and the characteristics of the property.

6.0 Process for acquisitions

6.1 The process by which individual properties are offered to the service by suppliers is set out in the relevant Service Specification documents for each type of Accommodation procured and in the procedures of the Accommodation Procurement Team.

6.2 Before agreeing to the use of a specific unit, officers in the service are responsible for ensuring a) that the relevant acquisitions process has been followed, and b) that the acquisition of the unit is consistent with the principles of the Acquisitions Policy as set out above.

6.3 Where there are not likely to be sufficient units in the borough and nearby boroughs to meet demand, officers in the service can authorise the acquisition of properties elsewhere in order that it will be possible to meet the service’s obligations.

6.4 When properties have been acquired the service will go on to consider which households should be offered them, applying the Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Sector Offer Allocations Policies.

7.0 Financial considerations

7.1 The difficulties experienced by the service in procuring accommodation in the borough and in nearby locations are largely related to the wider housing market, the availability to owners and landlords of other options which are more financially attractive (including letting properties to households not dependent on Housing Benefit) and the financial constraints on the Council. Considering this, the service keeps under review the rent charges and other financial incentives it offers to managing agents and property owners and will implement changes in these incentives where there is a business case for doing so.

7.2 The service is under an obligation to provide services within the budgetary limits set by the Council, and to seek value for money in all its dealings with third parties. For these reasons it is not possible for the Council to pay `asking rents’ for properties in the borough, or in any area, where to do so would create a severe financial imbalance between the maximum obtainable rent and the amount payable to the agent or owner. In seeking to provide suitable accommodation in the borough or as close to it as possible, the service must have due regard to the Council’s financial responsibilities. These considerations represent a significant impediment to obtaining as many units of accommodation in the borough or nearby as would be desirable to fulfil the principles of the Acquisitions Policy and the Temporary Accommodation and Private Rented Sector Offer Allocation Policies.

7.3 Notwithstanding the constraints described above, the service and the suppliers with whom it works in partnership are committed to maximising the supply of properties in or near the borough. This policy reflects this aspiration while taking account of the difficulties in procuring sufficient units of accommodation in the borough and the practical and financial impediments in obtaining properties of a sufficiently high standard in nearby locations.

. 7.4 In dealing with potential acquisitions under this policy, the service also has regard to the right of homeless applicants to request a review of the suitability of any accommodation offered to them.