

Waltham Forest Council - Temporary Accommodation Allocations Policy- April 2021

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the Council’s policy for the prioritisation of homeless households for temporary accommodation according to its location. The policy applies to all households placed in temporary accommodation by the Council under section 188, S190, S189B and section 193 of the Housing Act 1996. This policy does not apply to offers of permanent accommodation under Part VI of the Act.
- 1.2 This document should be read in conjunction with the Council’s Temporary Accommodation Acquisitions Policy.
- 1.3 Waltham Forest Council is committed to securing suitable temporary accommodation (TA) for homeless households where this is required under section 188, S190 or section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).
- 1.4 Our policy is to provide accommodation within Waltham Forest wherever reasonably practicable, except in cases where there is a specific reason why the household should not be accommodated within the borough itself (e.g. those at risk of violence in Waltham Forest). As outlined in the TA Acquisitions Policy however we are, only able to do this subject to the supply of suitable, affordable accommodation within the borough.
- 1.5 The Council does not have sufficient units of temporary accommodation within its own stock, and as a result, we rely on a supply of privately owned properties to meet our statutory obligations. Changes to the Local Housing Allowance, the introduction of the “benefit cap” and a number of other factors have reduced the number of properties in Waltham Forest that can be obtained for this purpose due to the cost of doing so. As a result, there will be an increasing need to use accommodation that may be at a distance from Waltham Forest. This policy is intended to ensure that we prioritise those who have the greatest need to be in or close to a particular location. Where a household needs to be moved away from a particular location for safety reasons, this will always be taken into account when deciding on temporary accommodation allocation.

2.0 Key Principles

- 2.1 In assessing the suitability of any property as temporary accommodation for a homeless household, the Council will consider whether the applicant can afford their housing without being deprived of basic essentials such as food, clothing, heating, transport and other essentials; and in so doing will take account of costs resulting from the location of the accommodation.

- 2.2 The Council will also take account of the distance from the borough, potential disruption to employment, education or caring responsibilities, accessibility of essential medical facilities and support, and accessibility of local amenities, services and transport.
- 2.3 Any decision regarding an allocation of TA will have regard to the Council's obligations under the Children Act 2004 including the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 2.4 All decisions regarding the allocation of TA will also have regard to the provisions of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2012.

3.0 Guidelines on the Location of Accommodation

- 3.1 The service's approach to the acquisition of properties for use as TA is set out separately in the Temporary Accommodation Acquisitions Policy.
- 3.2 For the purposes of making an allocation, all units of TA acquired under the above policy will be categorised as being in Zone A, B or C:
 - Zone A – located in the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF)
 - Zone B – 'located in Greater London and neighbouring districts in Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire'
 - Zone C – located outside of Zones A and B
- 3.3 As a general approach, available property is allocated on the day it becomes available, but where appropriate accommodation may be held back in anticipation of particular needs.

4.0 Prioritising Households for Temporary Accommodation

- 4.1 All households will be placed in accommodation in Zone A if suitable units are available. If no suitable units are available in Zone A, then they will be placed in suitable units in Zone B. If there are no suitable units in Zone B, then they will be placed in suitable units in Zone C.
- 4.2 Relevant facts regarding the household's circumstances will be gathered by officers in the course of their enquiries, including the Accommodation Needs Form completed by all homeless applicants who may require temporary accommodation
- 4.3 Where it is not reasonably practicable to provide temporary accommodation within the borough for all households requiring it, a series of decisions must be made about how available property will be allocated. These decisions will be made with reference to the circumstances of each household and on the relevant characteristics of the properties available to the service for use as temporary accommodation.
- 4.4 All homeless or potentially homeless households are individually assessed prior to placement to determine the type and location of temporary accommodation that should be offered.

Before any offer of temporary accommodation is made, a matching exercise will be carried out taking into account the requirements of the household and the nature and location of the individual property; the results of this matching exercise will be recorded in full on the applicant's file.

4.5 The following households will normally be given highest priority for accommodation within or close to the borough (or close to their place of employment/medical facilities/place of education as appropriate):

- Households with one child (or more) in secondary school in the year at the end of which they take their GCSEs or AS or A level exams
- Households with one child (or more) who has an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Households with one child (or more) who is the subject of a Child Protection Plan
- Households where one person (or more) is receiving NHS treatment for mental health problems from Secondary mental health services, (eg from the Community Mental Health team) and/or is on the Care Programme Approach (CPA)¹
- Households where one person (or more) is receiving medical treatment that can only be provided by a specific medical facility: this group will be prioritised for housing as close as possible to the medical facility
- Households where one person (or more) is in permanent and settled full time or part time employment and has been for at least three-months prior to the offer (or in appropriate circumstances the review) . Part time employment must be for a minimum of either 16 hours for a single person household or 24 hours for a couple per week – this group will be prioritised for housing as close as possible to their workplace.
- Households where a member of the household is caring for another person in the borough who falls into one of the following categories:
 - a) Over 75 years old and living alone, or with no other member of the household under 75 years of age, OR
 - b) In receipt of a registered care package, OR
 - c) In receipt of the medium or higher rate of the care component or the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance, any rate of the daily living part of the Personal Independent Payment (PIP or the higher rate of the mobility part of PIP, Attendance Allowance or War Disablement pension

4.6 It should be noted that the above categories and priorities are for guidance only and the individual circumstances of each household, including the time likely to be spent in the accommodation, must always be taken into account when determining the suitability of an offer of temporary accommodation.

¹ <http://www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect/guide/mental-health/Pages/care-programme-approach.aspx>

- 4.7 Given the shortage of available properties, it is likely that officers will need to make decisions to prioritise the allocation of particular properties not only between households who fall into one or more the categories described in 4.5, but also between households who do not fall into any of the categories.
- 4.8 The following circumstances will be taken into account when prioritising between households:
- Level of need relating to the welfare and safeguarding of any children in the household
 - Level of educational need
 - Identified risks posed by living in particular areas
 - Permanency/flexibility of employment
 - Access to transport
 - Level of need to be close to services and amenities
 - Level of need to be close to health services
 - Level of need to be close to support networks
 - Level of need to be close to cultural or religious amenities
 - Impact on caring responsibilities
 - Affordability of the accommodation
 - Impact of the relocation, and of occupying the accommodation on a continuing basis, on the well-being of household members
 - Impact of the relocation, and of occupying the accommodation on a continuing basis, on the well-being of any children in the household, having regard to the Council's duty under the Children Act 2004 to safeguard and promote their well-being
- 4.9 The impact of these and any other relevant circumstances will be considered both individually and cumulatively. Households that have a relatively low level of need when considering the above circumstances are more likely to be offered accommodation in zones B and C. However, even if a household is considered to have a lower level of need than other applicants to be in or close to the borough, they will be allocated available units in Zone A or Zone B if these units are not required by higher priority households.
- 4.10 Where a household is given highest priority for accommodation within or close to the borough (or close to their place of employment/medical facilities/place of education as appropriate) in accordance with paragraph 4.5 above but there is no accommodation immediately available within or close to the borough (or close to their place of employment/medical facilities/place of education as appropriate), a homeless household can be placed on an emergency basis in TA at *the nearest* location, which is otherwise suitable where there is availability on that day. The household will be given priority to be transferred to alternative TA as soon as a unit is available that would be more suitable in the longer term in accordance with the transfer procedure set out at appendix 1.

- 4.11 Where the service is notified of changes to the circumstances of household members after they have been placed in TA, these circumstances will be considered and a decision will be taken as to whether or not the household needs to be moved to more suitable TA.
- 4.12 Households in receipt of welfare benefits may be subject to restrictions on the amount of benefit they can receive, which may affect their ability to pay rent. Placement in Waltham Forest or nearby boroughs is subject to suitable accommodation being available and the applicant being able to afford accommodation in these areas.
- 4.13 Before an offer of temporary accommodation is made the Council will take into count the support and relocation needs of the household as set out at paragraph 5 below, making such inquiries as necessary to be satisfied that those needs will be met.

5.0 Support and Resettlement

- 5.1 All households provided with TA will be assessed at the point of placement in order to identify any support or resettlement needs arising from the location of the accommodation. Households with identified support needs (for example, those with mental or physical health issues or learning disabilities, those with substance misuse issues, care leavers, and older people) will be offered an interview with the Housing Support team, and a support plan will be prepared if appropriate to address identified needs. Support will be provided in relation to these needs, eg, accessing GPs, health visitors, education and Children Centres.
- 5.2 The Temporary Accommodation team will also provide details of incoming households to receiving boroughs as required. Where a particular area outside the borough is used on a regular basis for the provision of Temporary Accommodation, an information pack will be provided to households being provided with temporary accommodation covering local services and facilities in that area.
- 5.3 For any household placed in Temporary Accommodation outside of the borough, information will be provided on how to access local services, amenities and facilities in the local area. In particular they will be given an information sheet which has a range of useful information which includes:
- Registering for local Council Tax support
 - Registering with the Local GP
 - What to do if they need emergency funds
 - How to apply for a school place in the borough in which they are going to reside
- 5.4 The information sheet also provides details of how to contact the Support Officer if they need any further help. For applicants with ongoing support needs, the Temporary Accommodation Resident Support team can provide a full support service, including:
- assistance with accessing local sources of support,
 - arranging transport to particular locations to enable support to continue,

- applying for freedom passes and similar concessionary schemes in their new locality
- help with journeys to school
- applying for local school places as appropriate.
- signposting to other services for assistance with health issues, dealing with particular experiences (eg domestic violence) etc.
- assistance with accessing education, training and employment

5.5 The Support Team will also confirm the availability of school places, and develop links with schools' admissions services, in any areas outside Zones A and B where large numbers of temporary accommodation placements are being made.

5.6 In conjunction with the Temporary Accommodation Acquisitions Policy, this allocations policy seeks to ensure that all temporary accommodation placements are made based on

- a) a comprehensive assessment of the homeless household's circumstances and needs, and
- b) a balanced assessment of the needs of all households requiring temporary accommodation against the characteristics of the properties which are available to be allocated at any given point

5.7 This policy takes fully into account the requirements of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012. Applicants accommodated under this policy under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 can request a statutory review of the suitability of any accommodation offered to them, in accordance with section 202 of the Act.