

# Social Housing Allocations Policy Review

Durham County Council



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# What is the Durham Key Options (DKO) Scheme?

- The DKO scheme is a social housing partnership that allocates 43,000 social houses across the county to residents on the council's housing register
- The allocations process must be fair, consistent, and prioritise applicants in greatest need
- The DKO partnership is between DCC and our housing provider partners. DCC has four full partners and 15 sub-partners
- The four main partners are Believe Housing, Livin, Karbon Homes and North Star who let 100% of their properties via the DKO Scheme
- There are a further 15 registered housing providers who let a minimum of 50% of their empty properties to residents
- Houses are allocated according to an 'Allocations Policy'

**believe**  
housing

**Livin**

**karbon**  
homes

 **NORTH STAR**

**Durham**  
County Council 

# What is the Allocations Policy ?

The allocations policy is a shared set of rules on how social houses are advertised and allocated to those on the housing register.

The allocations policy allows people on the housing register to bid for available properties based on the Band 'of need' they are placed in.

On the current register, our policy categorises applicants into 4 bands of need. The band a person is placed within should match their level of housing need.

Properties are currently allocated in order of band. When properties are advertised, applicants within Band 1 are considered first, then Bands 2, 3 and 4.

In terms of level of need, Band 1 is for those with the most urgent housing need and Band 4 is for those with no housing need.



# Why are we reviewing the Allocations Policy?

The Social Housing Allocations Policy has not been fully reviewed since 2017 and much has changed:

- We have a housing crisis with a shortage of affordable housing (and people priced out of the private rented sector).
- More people are becoming homeless and require temporary accommodation.
- Since the pandemic, we have seen the waiting list for social housing in County Durham increase by around 30% from 7,000 people to nearly 11,000.
- In 2023/24, 88% of all lets went to those in Band 1 and Band 2 as more people are presenting with more pressing needs for housing.
- The average number of bids on social houses in the county has increased from 4 bids per property in 2017 to 44 bids per property in 2023-24.
- We have identified six key issues that we want to consult on as part of the policy review.

# Key Issue 1. Who qualifies for the housing register? (4 parts on qualification)

## **Part A qualification – Should people have a recent connection to County Durham?**

- Recent connection is someone who has lived or worked in County Durham for at least 12 months or someone who requires care support from someone in the county.
- Certain groups who would be exempt from requiring recent connection: armed forces veterans, domestic abuse victims and care leavers.
- *Q - Should only people with a recent connection to County Durham qualify to join the register here?*

## **Part B qualification – Should we remove those with no housing need?**

- Band 4 (no housing need) has the largest number of people in it, over 5,000 people and 47% of total people on our housing register.
- Only 6% of Band 4 were allocated a house in the last year.
- We are considering removing Band 4 to ensure that we make best use of our available properties.



# Key Issue 1. Who qualifies for the housing register? (parts C and D of qualification )

## Part C qualification - Disqualified for unacceptable behaviour

- People can be disqualified from joining the housing register if they, or a member of their household, has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour.
- Current policy sets out the disqualification behaviours.
- During 2023/24, 9% (1,758) of those who applied to join the register were disqualified - 97% of these were due to unacceptable behaviour.
- Is this too many? We are reviewing what constitutes unacceptable behaviour.

## Part D qualification – Should we remove people who have the money to choose from more housing options?

- We are considering applying a financial test to understand if people have the finances to access other housing options based on their circumstances.
- The current policy allows anyone to access the register regardless of income, equity of assets. **Should there be a financial test to qualify?**





# Key Issue 2. Better use of our social housing stock (two parts based on under occupation).

## **Under occupation by existing tenants**

- There is a shortage of larger family homes (3 or 4-bedroom properties) in County Durham
- Current register has 223 active applicants who want properties with 4-bedrooms or more
- But only 1% of all lets in 2023/24 were for 4-bedroomed properties (18 properties) while the under occupancy of social housing is a problem
- How can we encourage people to downsize if they are under occupying their home?

## **Single person or couples applying (future tenants)**

- Single people and couples can currently apply for two and three-bedroomed properties
- We are considering removing the ability to apply for a three-bedroomed property by a single person or couple (with no children).





# Key issue 3. Local Lettings Policies (LLPs)

- Local Lettings Policies are a tool that allows local issues to override the Countywide Allocations Policy in local areas
- We need to understand what local issues justify a LLP in the future and will be asking a question on this:
- For example, here are three examples of issue but there could be more:

Demand for  
affordable  
housing

ASB

New Build  
Housing

# Key issue 4. How best to prioritise people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

## **More priority for people 'at risk' of becoming homeless?**

- Those at risk of becoming homeless within the next 56 days are currently placed in Band 2 on the housing register.
- We are proposing to give people at risk of becoming homeless in the next 56 days greater priority for housing than those already homeless.

## **Temporary accommodation**

- We have been running a trial with our housing provider partners to place all applicants living in temporary accommodation into the highest priority band to get them permanently rehoused.
- This has been successful; therefore, we would like to ask your views on making this change to the allocations policy a permanent change.



# Key Issue 5. The priority given to medical and domestic abuse cases

## Medical assessments for housing

- In the current policy if you have an urgent medical condition, you are given Band 1 priority if this medical condition is related to your current housing (about 220 applicants).
- But most people (around 3,000 people) go into Band 2 with non-urgent medical condition.
- We are considering how we can better categorise those with medical issues by moving from the current two categories of urgent and non-urgent to a three-tiered system to provide greater priority to those in most housing need.
- We are asking if all medical assessments should be validated by a medical professional.

## Victims of domestic abuse

- People on the housing register who are victims of domestic abuse are currently banded together with people with other welfare needs.
- We are considering whether to change this by giving additional priority to victims of domestic abuse.



# Key issue 6. Our monitoring and service standards

## Service Levels

- We will be looking at how we can make improvements to our applications process and customer experience.
- We will be asking people on the register what currently works well and what does not work well when they contact the DKO housing providers.

## Vision and Objectives

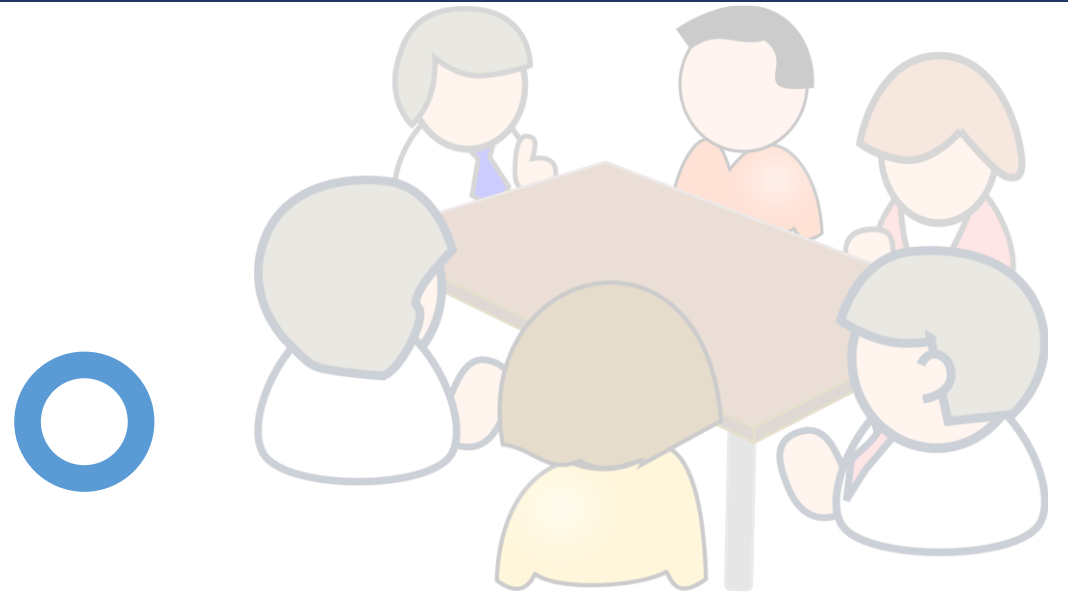
- On the survey, we will also be asking whether our vision and objectives for the Policy Review are the correct ones

# Summary

The allocations policy review gives DCC an opportunity to consult on a new housing allocations policy that:

- Should respond to the current housing crisis and policy changes at a local and national level.
- Incorporates views on these six key issues from our partners and the public from the two phases of public consultation.

The response we get to this consultation, will provide an excellent evidence base, so we can consult on a new draft policy later in 2025.





# Consultation and Contact details

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## Consultation

- The consultation takes place from 15 January to 12 March 2025 for an 8 week period.
- Consultees will include RP partners, tenants' groups, Elected Members, AAPs and Town and Parish Councils.
- Detailed consultation paper on website.
- Online survey for everyone that takes people through the key issues and consultation questions.

## Contact details

- Website – [www.letstalkcountydurham.co.uk](http://www.letstalkcountydurham.co.uk)
- Contact us by e-mail – [choicebasedlettings@durham.gov.uk](mailto:choicebasedlettings@durham.gov.uk) 
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- DCC on Facebook- [www.facebook.com/durhamcouncil](https://www.facebook.com/durhamcouncil)
- DCC on X - [x.com/durhamcouncil](https://x.com/durhamcouncil) (formerly twitter)

Any  
Questions or  
Comments?

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