

MHCLG Social housing allocation evidence collection: St Mungo's response

St Mungo's welcomes the review of social housing allocations guidance. Allocation barriers can prolong homelessness, delay move-on from temporary and supported accommodation, and reduce capacity for others who need support.

St Mungo's provides supported and emergency accommodation, outreach, floating support and move-on services across several local areas. This gives us practical insight into effective allocation practices and barriers to access. A good allocations system should help people move from homelessness services into suitable homes through fair, timely and flexible decisions that reflect their needs. The evidence below draws on our service experience, case studies, data and research.

What is working well

- Some local authorities award additional housing priority to people at risk of harassment or violence. This has helped women supported by our services who have experienced violence against women and girls to secure a suitable social home more quickly.
- In one local authority, a dedicated senior policy adviser on violence against women and girls has helped ensure that applicants' experiences of violence are reflected in housing advice and allocation decisions.
- Some local authorities previously reserved a proportion of social homes for people ready to leave supported accommodation. Clear eligibility criteria and referral processes made it easier for services to help people move into secure housing, preventing bottlenecks in supported accommodation and freeing up spaces for others who needed them. In some boroughs, the Independent Move On Referral (IMOR) process has supported positive joint working by providing a clear route for services to refer people who are ready to leave supported accommodation.
- Pausing or suspending housing-register accounts for people who were bidding for council homes before entering custody, rather than disqualifying them, is a positive practice. It enables services to liaise with the client's housing officer so they can resume bidding on release.

Barriers and challenges

Access to social housing and move-on

- People in supported accommodation may have little realistic chance of receiving enough priority on housing registers to secure a social home and are often directed towards private renting, where landlords may be unwilling to accept them. Clearing House and Housing First provide alternative routes, but limited places and restrictive eligibility criteria are challenges to access.
- Our services have seen how rigid local connection criteria can exclude applicants with a longstanding connection to an area because of a short gap in their recent address history.

Case study: A longstanding local connection interrupted by a short address gap

We are supporting a client with around 20 years of address history and a longstanding connection to a London borough. A one-year gap within the most recent five-year period means they do not meet the allocation requirement. Strict application of the policy has significantly reduced their housing options and is likely to keep them in the homelessness pathway longer than necessary.

- People who may be eligible for social housing can lose their place on a housing register when they do not maintain regular contact with the local authority. This particularly disadvantages people experiencing homelessness or complex needs, who may find it difficult to respond consistently to correspondence or complete repeated administrative requirements. Local authorities should take reasonable steps to maintain contact and avoid removing applicants without proactive checks or engagement with known support services.

Other qualification and exclusion criteria

- Local connection and cross-boundary allocation rules can restrict access to suitable homes outside an applicant's current area. For people in hostels who rely on local mental health services, pharmacies, GPs and wider support networks, an out-of-area allocation can disrupt essential support and undermine tenancy sustainment.
- Our services report that affordability assessments, including consideration of debt or rent arrears, can restrict access to social housing for people experiencing homelessness. These factors should not automatically exclude an applicant, particularly where they arose through circumstances outside the person's control.
- Eligibility criteria relating to support needs or a history of antisocial behaviour can exclude people with complex needs who may still be able to sustain a tenancy with appropriate support.

Case study: successful tenancy sustainment

One client with significant support needs was initially viewed as unsuitable for a council tenancy because she was perceived as not having made enough progress. Following sustained advocacy, she was offered a new-build social home away from an area where previous relationships could have undermined her stability, alongside floating support. She sustained the tenancy and thrived. This case demonstrates that assessments based on perceived readiness can underestimate people's potential and that a suitable home, location and tailored support can enable people with complex needs to sustain social housing successfully.

Support needs and groups facing additional barriers

- Allocation rules based only on the applicant's current household can overlook wider family circumstances and ongoing parental relationships, limiting access to a home that supports regular contact with children.
- Our services have seen care leavers lose vital support after turning 21 when cases are closed because they have not explicitly confirmed that they still need help. Maintaining contact can be particularly difficult for young people in custody. Professionals should

therefore take a proactive approach and avoid closing cases when communication becomes difficult, as premature withdrawal of support can restrict access to social housing and make resettlement more challenging.

- Our services have seen people move from homelessness or hostel accommodation into social housing without a named housing contact, making it harder to resolve antisocial behaviour and other housing-related problems before they put the tenancy at risk.

Nomination agreements and tenancy support

- Joint working and nomination arrangements can operate well, but applicants perceived as having higher support needs or a complex tenancy history may be overlooked even where appropriate support is available.
- Local authorities should provide quota places for people ready to leave supported housing, supported by transparent criteria, established referral routes, a named housing contact and tenancy sustainment support tailored to individual need.

Consistency and accessibility

- Differences between borough allocation policies mean that people in similar circumstances may qualify for social housing in one area but not another, creating confusion and a sense of unfairness. For example, some boroughs restrict single applicants under 40 to studio flats while others do not, making options harder to explain and offers less suitable.
- Accessibility needs are not always identified early enough, and existing adapted homes are not always allocated efficiently. As a result, people who need a ground-floor, accessible or sheltered property can face longer waits, while suitable homes may remain unavailable and adaptations made after allocation can add unnecessary costs.
- Our services have supported people who became homeless after losing a council home held by a spouse or family member following that person's death or departure. Clients often had limited knowledge of their succession rights and of how the loss of their home affected their eligibility for the housing register. They reported receiving unclear or incorrect advice when approaching the council, and in some cases their housing applications were not progressed until a support worker intervened. Allocation guidance should require local authorities to provide clear, accessible information about eligibility and housing-register decisions, alongside effective routes to advocacy, so that people can exercise their rights and avoid prolonged homelessness.

Conclusion

Updated guidance should help people move from homelessness services into suitable social homes by removing unnecessary barriers, enabling timely move-on and promoting fairer, more consistent and flexible approaches to local connection, exclusion criteria, accessibility and tenancy support. St Mungo's would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence and examples from our services to support the review.