

Local Lettings Policy

Properties purchased via the Local Authority Housing Fund

Background

This Local Lettings Policy sets out the criteria for letting properties purchased by Stevenage Borough Council (the council) via the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF). The policy covers properties purchased under the main element of the grant intended for Ukrainian and Afghan households and under the bridging element which is intended for large Afghan families who have resided in hotel accommodation. This programme is designed to respond to the large and unanticipated pressures from the significant numbers of arrivals from Ukraine and Afghanistan. This is therefore focussed only on these cohorts and no other cohorts. All homes delivered through this fund will be affordable/low-cost housing both in the immediate term, and to support wider local authority housing and homelessness responsibilities for the remainder of their lifetime. The council will determine the precise rent level and tenure of homes in line with the fund objectives and other existing rules/regulations.

The objectives for the scheme as defined by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are as follows:

- Ensure recent humanitarian Afghan and Ukraine schemes provide sufficient longer-term accommodation to those they support;
- Support areas with housing pressures so that these areas are not disadvantaged by increased pressures from these arrivals on the existing housing and homelessness systems;
- Mitigate the expected increased pressures on local authority homelessness and social housing resources which arise from the eligible cohort as sponsorship/family placements/bridging accommodation arrangements come to an end by increasing the provision of affordable housing available to local authorities to support those in the cohort who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in bridging accommodation;
- Reduce emergency, temporary and bridging accommodation costs;
- Deliver accommodation that as far as possible allows for the future conversion of housing units to support wider local authority housing and homelessness responsibilities to UK nationals (i.e. after usage by this cohort ends);
- Utilise accommodation solutions to enable effective resettlement and economic integration of the eligible cohort;
- Reduce pressures on the existing housing and homelessness systems and those waiting for social housing.

Allocating/letting LAHF properties to cohort groups

The council must ensure that the homes funded through LAHF provide an increase in the number of properties available to the defined scheme cohort, by the number of homes funded via LAHF.

It is for the council to determine how stock is efficiently used and approval is not required from DLUHC for backfilling/swapping a property. Any swapped property within existing stock should remain available for subsequent letting to meet the immediate needs of the eligible cohort.

Properties which are procured in relation to the bridging element of the grant (i.e. 4+ bedroom properties) are only for larger Afghan households who were accommodated in Home Office bridging hotels. The Council will communicate with other Local Authorities in Hertfordshire to meet local demand. The Council can either indicate a preference for a specific family to be matched to an acquired property on the ARAP/ACRS property offer form. Alternatively, if the Council is unable to identify a specific family who has resided in a bridging hotel, the Council will put forward properties via the Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) to be centrally matched by the Home Office.

Properties procured in relation to the main element of the grant can be used to for both Ukrainian and Afghan households.

If the Council does not have individuals from the eligible cohort presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness at the time the properties are available, the council will consider options which are in line with the objectives of the scheme. For example, if the council has difficulty in letting a property purchased under the main element of the scheme to the eligible cohort, the council will work with other Local Authorities locally where there may be greater need, or to make these homes available for smaller households who have resided in the bridging hotels. If a suitable household from the eligible cohort in need of this housing isn't available locally, the council will contact DLUHC.

The Council will make reasonable endeavours to prioritise households based on who (in the target cohort) is most in need when matching eligible households with properties.

All properties will be let via a direct let process. Stevenage Borough Council will review demand within the borough initially and then recommendations made by partners.

All applicants will be assessed as suitable for the properties based on the following criteria:

- a) Applicants must complete a homeless application with the Council's Housing Options Team and be considered as homeless as defined by Part 7 of The Housing Act 1996.
- b) Applicants must register as an applicant on the Stevenage Borough Council Housing Register and meet all eligibility criteria as defined in the most current Allocations Policy except for Local Connection and Home Ownership. This cohort will not be able to meet the Local Connection criteria given their circumstances and some applicants may own a property in Ukraine or Afghanistan and not be able to access it.
- c) Properties will be let to applicants who do not own a property as an Introductory Tenancy. After a 12 months trial period, if all tenancy conditions have been kept, the tenancy will automatically become secure.
- d) Those applicants who own a property and may be able to access that property at a future date, will occupy the property under a non-secure tenancy agreement. If it can be shown that the owned property is no longer accessible and the occupants have complied with the conditions of their non-secure tenancy agreement, the tenure will be made secure.

Social Housing Legacy

It is up to the Council to determine when the immediate needs of the eligible cohort have been addressed and therefore the appropriate time for the housing to transition to being used for general housing and homelessness responsibilities. The Council will consider the level of housing need and homelessness presentations amongst the eligible cohort as part of this.