



## **Report on the review of the Scheme of Lettings – Allocations.**

Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 requires housing authorities to set out the order of priority to be accorded to households assessed as qualified for social housing support and to households, already in receipt of social housing support, that are approved for transfer. This is the first review of the scheme, which was adopted in 2014. The Scheme was amended in 2017 to include provision for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

A Scheme of Lettings sub-group of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee was formed and met on 4 occasions with additional feedback by email submissions. A number of key themes emerged in the course of the consultation and these are developed below:

### **Homelessness:**

We are proposing to continue assessing homelessness as defined in the 1988 Act and recording it as the basis of need but will no longer prioritise offers of social housing to homeless families ahead of other households who have prior dates of application.

The rationale for this proposed change is as follows:

1. DCC provided a higher than ever number of homeless households with social housing in 2017, including 130 Rapid Built units built specifically for homeless families. We consider that it was the correct response to the housing situation at that time; however, we need to be equally conscious of the number of families with far longer time on the housing list who are themselves moving between rental properties and facing many of the same issues in relation to security of tenure in the private rental market.
2. Some households with very long waiting times are at risk of being disqualified on income grounds despite having an assessed need over a number of years and local authorities cannot exercise discretion in relation to income thresholds. By directing more housing offers to those longest qualified it is hoped to address this.
3. There is overcrowding in the private sector but also within our own social housing stock that may become unsustainable and result in homelessness. There was a strong view from the Elected Members' sub-group that we need to prevent homelessness and deterioration of existing stock by relieving overcrowding.

4. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive has researched patterns of use by families in emergency accommodation. Families who are new to homelessness are far more likely to avail of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and have shorter stays. Once families stay beyond 6 months in emergency services the uptake of HAP decreases.
5. We are concerned that families will endure a prolonged period in emergency accommodation and not consider alternatives, in order to secure what they believe to be the most sustainable option for their family i.e. social housing. This is completely understandable but DCC does not have adequate stock and families may not realise that waiting for a social housing offer given the current numbers in homeless services is likely to take some years.

While it might seem counter-intuitive to cease prioritising families for social housing, it is with a view to encouraging shorter stays and supporting families to rent independently with enhanced financial and social support. This would be balanced by increasing the target allocations to the Transfer Homeless HAP band.

**In summary what we propose for Homeless Families is:**

- a) Provision of Emergency accommodation including Family Hubs.
- b) Qualification for the Homeless HAP scheme, with a month's deposit and rent in advance and 50% uplift on existing rent supplement caps;
- c) Homeless families will retain their length of time entitlement on the list.
- d) Expanded place finder service to assist households in emergency accommodation to find accommodation;
- e) Higher proportion of allocations to Band 1 **Transfer HAP**.
- f) Under CAS and other housing development schemes DCC will continue to set aside a small proportion of dwellings specifically targeted at vulnerable homeless households. These will include housing provided by Focus Ireland, Peter McVerry Trust, Dublin Simon, Alone inter alia;
- g) Homeless households may apply for medical and welfare priority in the normal way;
- h) Any homeless households who would be reached for offer under the length of time qualified on the list will continue to be offered social housing support;
- i) Visiting support varying from intensive and indefinite (Housing First) to time-limited and low-support may be made available to homeless households.
- j) We will continue to set aside a number of units for Housing First as the most effective response to rough sleeping and chronic homelessness. Priority for the units is based on time homeless and level of vulnerability to rough sleeping.

- k) An impact Assessment of Changes Review will be commissioned by the Council in March 2019.

### **Children in Shared Custody/Access arrangements:**

The issue of children in access arrangements not being offered bedroom accommodation with partial access/custody arrangements has been considered. All parties agreed that in principle it would be beneficial to be able to provide for the overnight access through provision of extra bedrooms. However, Dublin City Council must have regard to the housing available to it and to secure the most beneficial, effective and efficient use of such limited stock as we have. Consideration must be given to children in overcrowding situations (Band 2) and families currently in emergency accommodation where children do not have any access to a separate bedroom (Band 1). The impact of allowing additional bedroom requirements in these cases may be significant:

- a) There are currently 895 access households identified on the system.
- b) It is likely this would increase if the policy changes. This may impact significantly on current housing and transfer list positions for 2 bedroom accommodation.
- c) There will be an effect on the supply both in social housing and in the rental market of 2 bedroom accommodation available to families if separated parents are also competing for this accommodation.

If the supply were not so constrained, Dublin City Council would recommend listing separated parents with partial custody/access arrangements for one additional bedroom on assessment of the relevant legal documentation. However given the extensive waiting lists in Dublin City Council, it is recommended that while there are households with children on the housing wait list with a greater need, i.e. no access to a bedroom, the following should apply:

- a) Children of parents living apart will in general be included in the Household of each parent but the type and extent of accommodation, which they require, will be assessed taking into account the extent to which their need for accommodation is met in the household of the other parent.
- b) Dublin City Council will assign multiple bedroom unit requirements to the parent with whom the children reside for the greater part and a 1-bedroom requirement to the other parent.

### **Older Persons:**

Dublin City Council sets aside a proportion of its stock to cater for the housing needs of older persons. As the definition of older persons is defined in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 as 65 years and older, it is recommended, *without affecting existing qualified applicants*, that the age of qualification for Older Persons accommodation be raised to 65 with consideration on application of persons 60 years and over where any of the following factors apply:

- 1. Disability: Physical, sensory, intellectual or mental health
- 2. Medical Grounds: if the applicant has been awarded medical priority.
- 3. Compassionate: If the applicant has been awarded welfare priority.

4. Homeless: If the applicant is residing in Section 10 funded accommodation.

### **Disability:**

Dublin City Council will require 5% of all new developments to make specific provision for disability. Dublin City Council under its CAS and other housing development schemes sets aside a small proportion of dwellings for individuals who, in the opinion of the housing authority and supported by objective assessments, require specific supports relating to their form of disability and will allocate appropriately (based on date of qualification in the first instance and match of needs in the second). E.g. HAIL/Cheshire Homes etc.

### **Medical Priority:**

As requested we have attempted to set out more clearly how medical priority is awarded and to separate it from disability.

### **Refusals:**

We are setting out more clearly what happens in the case of refusals of housing offers.

### **Appeal:**

We have included for an appeal of decisions.

### **Other changes:**

A small number of other changes have been made. We have brought in sections that were formerly in the guidance document to create one unified document to explain how you qualify for social housing and how we prioritise households for offer. These include re-ordering Sections 1 and 2.

### **Equalisation of Band One:**

It is proposed to use the qualifying date for Band 1 and not the categories within Band 1 as the basis for housing offer. In effect this means there would be no advantage in having a medical over a welfare priority and no need to apply twice for priority.

### **Transfer Chain:**

This is a new proposal based on a suggestion in one of the sub-groups. It would allow for DCC to implement a number of moves in a chain to meet a number of needs and optimise the stock.

### **Conclusion:**

This draft revised scheme is being submitted for the consideration of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee and if endorsed will be brought to the April meeting of the City Council for approval and implementation.

**Brendan Kenny**  
**Deputy Chief Executive**  
**8<sup>th</sup> March 2018**