

Durham Key Options Lettings Scheme

Consultation Survey

This survey outlines proposals to change aspects of the Durham Key Options (DKO) Lettings Policy. The DKO lettings policy was implemented in 2009 with the last policy review taking place in 2012. The proposals for this review have been carefully considered to address current housing need within our communities, legislation and to simplify the lettings process for applicants.

This survey is your opportunity to provide feedback which will be considered before changes to the lettings policy are made. There are ten proposals in total.

Following the consultation process any proposals which are approved will be introduced in October 2016.

Your Name(s)	
Your DKO Reference/Bidding Number	
DKO Partner landlord:	

Q1 Priority Need

Current Policy: In line with government legislation, specific housing needs must be included within our lettings scheme. Once assessed, applicants are awarded a “band” relevant to their housing need criteria. There are currently five bands (A to E) awarded for differing levels of housing need; Band A being urgent to Band E being no housing need. Each band represents differing housing need criteria. For example: applicants with a medical need, overcrowded or in financial hardship may qualify for Band C, applicants wishing to live independently or would like a larger home (but not overcrowded) would qualify for Band D.

Proposed Changes: The current five tiered banding structure is sometimes difficult for applicants to understand. A four tiered banding structure is proposed (Bands 1 to 4). This new approach will still combine the recognised levels of housing need, however, the banding criteria will be streamlined to ensure applicants understand banding priority and why their band has been awarded.

Do you agree with changing from five priority bands (A to E) to four priority bands (1 to 4) ?

Yes

No

Q2 Quotas – How homes are let

Current Policy: Homes are advertised through the DKO lettings Scheme with a “quota” being awarded to each band. This means that throughout the year; Band A (Urgent Housing Need) will receive priority for all properties available in the first instance, but, if no Band A applicants apply, priority for the properties will be awarded preference going to other bands. The quota is currently set as 45% of properties being advertised with priority to applicants in Band B, 40% in Band C and 15% in Band D. Band E receives no priority. This system means that most bands will be given some degree of priority for homes throughout the year and recognises all levels of housing need on the register. However, it also means that some homes are allocated to applicants with a less urgent housing need than others.

Proposed Changes: The quota system can be confusing. Removing the quota system would simply mean that properties will be offered in order of housing need. Those with the highest level of need (Band 1) who have applied/bid would be offered the home first, then applicants in Band 2, then Band 3 and finally Band 4.

Do you agree with the removal of the current banding quota (i.e. all homes will be allocated strictly in banding order in the future)?

Yes

No

Q3 Medical need

Current Policy: Medical Need is awarded based upon the level of difficulty an applicant has managing in their current home and the property type needed to alleviate these needs. There are currently three tiers of medical need awarded to applicants ranging from Urgent Medical Need (Band A), High Medical Need (Band B) and Medium Medical Need (Band C).

Proposed Changes: Review the criteria for medical need and combine the award into a two tier approach; urgent and medium need. Any applicants currently assessed as High Medical Need will be re-assessed with some moving up to Urgent Medical depending on their circumstance. This will streamline the assessment process and ensure those applicants with the greatest level of medical need are awarded the priority.

Do you agree with changing from three tiers of medical assessment (urgent, high and medium) to two tiers of medical assessment (urgent and medium)?

Yes

No

Q4 Time on the waiting list

Current Policy: There is currently no time limit for how long an applicant can remain on the housing register. This means that an applicant that has been awarded a band based upon an urgent or high housing need could wait for their preferred property to become available before applying despite other suitable homes that may have been available within the time period.

Proposed Changes: A time limit will be applied to the most urgent banding award (for example 12 months). Urgent housing need should mean applicants require a home quickly and should not spend years with an urgent need banding before applying for a home. The individual applicant's circumstances will be considered after 12 months to assess whether any reasonably suitable homes could have been applied for within the time period.

Do you agree with limiting the amount of time the highest priority applicants (band 1) can spend in the top band, where it is reasonable that another home could be found in that time (i.e. 12 months)?

Yes

No

Q5 Threatened with Homelessness

Current Policy: Applicants that are under threat of losing their current home within 3 months (i.e. the landlord has served a Notice to Quit to the tenant) are awarded Band D priority. This is not currently a high level banding award for someone who maybe under threat of losing their home in a short space of time.

Proposed Changes: This banding award will be removed from the policy. Instead; any applicant stating they are under threat of losing their home will be referred directly to Durham County Council's Housing Solutions section to receive a more thorough assessment and receive specialised advice and assistance.

Do you agree with removing the banding reason 'Threatened with homelessness' (band D) for those providing notice from landlords; be replaced with a direct referral to the Council's Housing Solutions section for advice and assistance?

Yes

No

Q6 Wanting Larger Accommodation

Current Policy: Overcrowding is currently a Band B or Band C priority (depending on the level of overcrowding). Overcrowding is calculated based upon the number of bedrooms in the current home, the ages of the household members and the property size required.

There is however an alternative banding award for households who are not overcrowded (i.e. a couple with two young children living in a two bedroom house) who would like a larger property. Band D is currently awarded to assist with a move to a larger property where no overcrowding is present but due to the number of household members more bedrooms would be preferred.

Proposed Changes: This banding award would be removed. Priority would still be given to applicants who are overcrowded to ensure that larger homes are allocated to those with a greater need in the first instance. However, applicants will still be able to apply for larger properties providing they can afford them (i.e. they are not subject to an under-occupancy charge).

Do you agree with removing the banding reason 'wanting larger accommodation, outside of the overcrowding criteria' (band D)?

Yes

No

Q7 Transferring Tenants

Current Policy: A tenant can apply to re-join the housing register and move again as soon as they have accepted the offer of a property. This can result in neighbours coming and going within a community and properties being accepted by people who never intended to stay (over someone who may have wanted the property as a long term home).

Proposed Change: A tenant will need to remain in their home for a period of at least 12 months before applying to re-join the housing register. It is hoped this will encourage applicants to only apply for homes which they wish to remain in and feel settled. In such instances where circumstance change and the tenant has a housing need an application may be considered though.

Do you agree that current tenants of Durham Key Options landlords, assessed as having no housing need, will not be allowed to re-apply to join the DKO housing register for a period of 12 months after accepting a home?

Yes

No

Q8 Rent and Mortgage Arrears

Current Policy: Applicants will be allowed to join the housing register providing they do not have more than eight weeks rent or mortgage arrears (or rechargeable repairs)

Proposed Change: Applicants will not be allowed to join the housing register if any rent or mortgage arrears are owed. Discretion would still be used to assess genuine reasons for arrears (such as financial hardship) and where applicants can demonstrate efforts to clear any outstanding arrears.

Do you agree with changing the guidelines to disqualify applicants with rent/mortgage arrears (and rechargeable repairs) from eight weeks to zero weeks?

Yes

No

Q9 Affordability

Current Policy: At present, single applicants can apply for 1 or 2 bedroom homes, applicants with two children could apply for 2 or 3 bedroom homes, and applicants with three children could apply for 3 or 4 bedroom homes etc

Since the introduction of welfare reforms by the government applying for a property that is “under-occupied” may result in financial hardship for the applicant. Applicants who are not affected by the welfare reforms are still restricted to apply for homes that match their household size in the first instance.

Proposed Change: Properties will only be offered to applicants providing they can afford the rental cost of the home to prevent putting tenants at risk of financial hardship. This may mean that applicants will not be able to be offered homes that cost more than they can afford (such as applicants in receipt of welfare support who would be significantly under-occupying their property). This will also mean that applicants who can afford a larger home will be entitled to apply without being restricted to only the bedrooms they require.

Do you agree that applicants should only be offered homes if they can afford to pay the rent for that size home?

Yes

No

Q.10 Single applicants (under 35)

Current Policy: Single applicants over the age of 16 can apply for a 1 or 2 bedroom property. If the applicant takes on the tenancy of a 2 bedroom property and is in receipt of any housing related benefit they may be subject to the under-occupancy charge (“bedroom tax”).

Proposed Change: The government has introduced a new policy which means that that housing benefit for single people in social housing under 35 without children will be restricted to shared accommodation rates.

This means they will only be able to claim the same amount of benefit as a private tenant is able to claim for a room in a shared house.

This policy applies to tenancies which are signed for after 1 April 2016 and the changes to the benefit entitlement will be introduced in 2018.

This could mean that some single household tenants, aged under 35, not receive sufficient welfare support to cover the cost of their rent. It is proposed that DKO landlords could begin to offer shared tenancies (i.e. two single applicants applying separately to share the cost of their home) to minimise the risk of homelessness or enable applicants to access housing in the future.

In light of the changing benefit rules for single applicants under 35 years old, do you agree it is a good idea for DKO landlords to consider shared tenancies for single applicants (who can't afford to rent on their own) to access social housing in the future?

Yes

No

Thank you for taking the time to read and complete this survey.

If you have any addition comments; please provide these in the comments box below:

Equality Information

You do not need to complete this section of the survey if you would prefer not to disclose the information, however, the feedback would help us identify whether any specific applicants require further assistance to access the scheme

	Please Tick/Complete Which Applies
Gender	

Male	
Female	
Do you have access to the internet that you can use on a weekly basis?	
Yes	
No	
Your current employment status	
Unemployed	
0 – 16 hours paid work	
Part Time Paid Work	
Full Time Paid Work	
Your current Age	
Please state your age:	
Marital Status	
Single	
Married	
Civil Partnership	
Separated	
Divorced	
Widowed	
Are you disabled?	
Yes	
No	
Ethnic Group – White	
English	
Welsh	
Scottish	
Northern Irish	
Irish	
British	
Polish	
Lithuanian	
Any other white background (please state):	
Black or black British	
Caribbean	
African	
Any other black background (please state):	
Asian or Asian British	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
Any other Asian background (please state):	

	Please Tick/Complete Which Applies
Travelling Community	
Gypsy/Roma	

Traveller of Irish Decent	
Other member of travelling community (please state):	
Mixed or any Other Ethnic Group	
Please State:	
Religion/Belief	
Christian	
Hindu	
Jewish	
Muslim	
Sikh	
Buddhist	
None	
Other (please state):	
Sexual Orientation	
Homosexual/Gay Man/Lesbian	
Bisexual	
Heterosexual/Straight	
Prefer not to say	
Other	