

West Lancashire Borough Council Choice Based Lettings Policy



West Lancs HomeFinder

CHOICE BASED LETTING SCHEME POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

This documents sets out West Lancashire Borough Councils Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL). The policy covers the process that the council will follow for the allocation of all its properties. This document should be read in conjunction with the Councils Allocations Policy which fully explains how we prioritise applicants for housing using the Banding Scheme.

2. HOW THE SCHEME WORKS

Choice Based Lettings changes the way in which people access social housing in the borough. Applicants will first need to have applied and been accepted onto the councils housing register, at this stage they will be advised what priority band they are in.

All vacant properties will be advertised and applicants required to actively seek and 'bid' for properties in which they are interested. Applicants would only be considered for a property if it was a suitable size and type for their household. Applicants expressing an interest in a particular property will be shortlisted and the applicant with the highest priority (in the highest band for longest) will be made the offer and invited to view the property.

3. ADVERTISING

Properties which are empty or due to become empty will be openly advertised on a weekly cycle, on the West Lancs HomeFinder website www.westlancshomefinder.co.uk and in a free HomeFinder newsletter distributed to the councils Customer Service Points, various support agencies and key locations across the borough.

In the future, it is hoped that the scheme will be extended to cover all RSLs vacancies, those with accredited private landlords and shared ownership properties within the area.

DESCRIPTION

Adverts will include the following information about the property

- The location including street name
- Size and type of property
- Who is eligible to apply

- Weekly rent and service charges
- Type of heating
- If there is a garden and whether this is communal
- Details of any disabled adaptations
- Availability of a lift
- Parking facilities

LABELLING

Adverts will also detail who is eligible to bid for a property, ie

- Size and type household that the property is suitable for
- Any restrictions on age e.g. over 40s only
- Whether it is sheltered accommodation
- If pets allowed
- If preference is given to applicants with a local connection to the village

Properties will be advertised and bids accepted from 00:00 every Thursday until 23:59 on the following Tuesday.

LOCAL CONNECTION

In accordance with the councils Allocations Policy in areas with least stock the Council will give preference to applicants with a local connection. Generally these areas are rural or small village areas. The level of preference will reduce in areas with more stock or lower levels of demand. These areas and levels of preference are set out in the following table:

LOCAL CONNECTION AREAS

Altcar	100%
Appley Bridge	100%
Banks	100%
Bickerstaffe	100%
Halsall	100%
Haskayne	100%
Hesketh Bank	100%
Newburgh	100%
Parbold	100%
Rufford	100%
Scarisbrick	100%
Tarleton	100%
Westhead	100%
Wrightington	100%

Aughton	50%
Burscough	50%
Old Skelmersdale	50%
Ormskirk	50%
Up Holland/Roby Mill	50%

Ashurst	0%
Birch Green EMB/Central	0%
Clay Brow	0%
Digmoor	0%
Holland Moor	0%
Little Digmoor	0%
New Church Farm	0%
Tanhouse EMB and 4&5	0%
Yewdale	0%

100% Local Connection Areas

In areas where 100% local connection preference applies, all property adverts will be clearly labelled to explain that preference given to local applicants.

50% Local Connection Areas

In areas where the minimum 50% local connection preference applies 50% of all empty properties in these areas will be advertised as preference given to applicants with a local connection.

Where a property has been designated for local applicant's, offers will first be made to those with a local connection who have the highest priority and who have had that level of priority the longest. In cases where no bids are received from applicants meeting the local connections criteria then offers will be made in the normal manner based upon priority need and date order. Any preference for a local connection may only be given where the property advertised is of a type and size appropriate to the applicants needs.

Local Connection Criteria

To qualify for a local connection with an allocation area an applicant must normally

- Have lived in that area for a period of 3 out of the last 5 years prior to the date of their application; or
- Have close family who have lived in that area for a minimum of 2 years prior to the date of application and the applicant must indicate that they want to move nearer to them.

- Have been permanently employed in an area of the district for at least the previous 12-months or
- Be required to move to or remain in that area to receive support of local organisations or support facilities such as day centres or treatment centres which they could not otherwise reasonably attend.

4. EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Applicants will be able to express their interest (bid) in a property in a number of ways.

- Via the West Lancs HomeFinder website
- By telephone
- In person at one of the Councils Customer Service Points
- Text messaging

All applicants on the housing register can make up to 3 bids per advertising cycle. Applicants who have already accepted an offer of a property will be ineligible to bid.

Homeless Persons

Those applicants who have been accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need are expected to actively make bids against suitable properties.

Bidding patterns will be monitored for an initial period of 8 weeks. In situations where bids are not being made or all bids are against unobtainable properties the Homelessness Officer will offer further advice. If this bidding pattern continues after the 8 week period the officer will bid on the clients behalf and discharge duty on the first successful bid.

Where a homeless person has been bidding on reasonable properties but have not been successful the homeless officer in conjunction with the manager will consider whether to extend the period beyond 8 weeks.

SIZE OF PROPERTY

On acceptance of an application for housing the applicant will be advised what size and types of properties they are eligible to bid for. This decision is based on the following criteria.

Lettings Criteria

<u>Property Type</u>	<u>Qualifying Groups</u>
Bedsits	Single people & couples without children
Flats/Maisonettes	Single people, couples, families where the youngest child is aged over 16. Households with children aged under 16 if requested.
Houses	Households with children where the youngest is aged 16 or under.
Bungalows	Households with a disability & those over 60.

Sheltered housing is reserved for those single people or couples aged 60+.

Number of bedrooms

The number of bedrooms allocated will be dependent on the size of the household taking into account the bedroom standard.

The following criteria will be followed:

- Each married/co-habiting couple will require a bedroom
- Each adult aged 21 years or more will require a bedroom
- Each pair of children of the same sex aged between 10-20 will require a bedroom
- Each pair of children aged under 10 regardless of sex require a bedroom (once one child reaches the age of 10, they can be paired with another person of the same sex who is aged 20 or under. Where this is not possible, the unpaired child will require a separate bedroom).

Where there is a demonstrated need for an additional room for a carer or medical equipment (as evidenced by medical information), an additional bedroom can be allocated.

DIRECT LETS

Whilst the council aims to allocate all its empty properties via the CBL scheme it reserves the right to direct match applicants to properties in exceptional circumstances, these would include

- Public protection cases
- Successor tenants or those left in possession of a West Lancashire Council property who are failing to make bids
- Temporary or permanent decants
- Properties that have been significantly adapted
- Temporary accommodation
- Extra Care Sheltered accommodation

To ensure the scheme is as open and transparent as possible the council will still advertise Direct Let properties in the same way but no bids will be accepted.

OPEN LETS

Where a property has been recently advertised without receiving any bids the property and others the same in type and location may be designated as open let. These properties will be advertised on a first come first served basis, with the first applicant to express an interest being made an offer irrespective of their priority band.

5. SHORTLISTING

Expressions of interest will be placed in order of priority i.e. from Band A through to Band D. Where the shortlist contains more than one applicant in a band, the date that the applications were placed into that band will be used to prioritise them.

Where properties are targeted at specific customers, they will be given priority for that type of accommodation e.g. accessible accommodation for customers with disabilities or properties in Local Connection areas.

If an applicant is ranked first for more than one property and provided the eligibility criteria are met, they will be contacted to make a decision about which property they wish to accept subject to viewing.

If an applicant on the shortlist is considered to be ineligible for an offer they will be overlooked and the offer made to the next applicant. Applicants may be considered ineligible for offers for example: were they have failed to maintain regular repayments of rent, former tenant arrears, recharge debt or where a current tenant needs to complete repairs identified as their responsibility.

6. OFFERS

Applicants will be notified of an offer by post or telephone. As many of the councils vacancies will be advertised prior to the outgoing tenant leaving they may not be ready to view for a few weeks. In cases where the property is not empty an offer will be made on a provisional basis only, and may need to be withdrawn.

The Voids and Allocation Team will be able to provide an estimate of when the property is likely to be ready for occupation.

Were the first applicant refuses an offer of accommodation the Lettings Officer will go to the next highest banded applicant and so on.

7. VIEWING

Applicants are given the opportunity to view any property offered to them with an officer from the Voids and Allocations Team. Following the viewing the applicant is expected to decide whether they wish to accept the tenancy.

8. FEEDBACK

Information on all the properties let through the CBL system will be provided on the West Lancs HomeFinder website and in the CBL newsletter and will include the following information;

- Lettings results – property type and neighbourhood
- The total number of bids made for the property;
- The successful customer's band effective date

9. SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE APPLICANTS

We aim to ensure that all applicants are able to full participate in the CBL scheme and appreciate that some customers may require some additional support to do so.

At application stage applicants will be asked whether they require any additional help. This may include

- Advice or training on using the system and technology involved
- posting out the CBL newsletter,

- Nominating someone to bid on their behalf - this could be a family member or worker from a support agency. In exceptional circumstances where an applicant is unable to bid themselves and has no advocate a system of automated bidding can be used.
- although the newsletter will provide information in pictorial form applicants can also request large print, translations etc
- The West Lancs HomeFinder website will be W3C AA compliant, meeting current accessibility standards, and makes use of the Browsealoud text reader.