

APPENDIX 1

Placement policy for temporary accommodation and private rented sector offers

Part A: Introduction

1. This document sets out the Council's Policy for the allocation of temporary accommodation and properties, offered in discharge of its statutory obligations in the private rented sector (PRSO), to homeless households according to its location. This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Temporary Accommodation Procurement Policy.
2. The policy applies to all households placed in accommodation by the Council under section 188, S190, S189B and section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended and Localism Act 2011. This policy also takes into account the statutory requirements on local authorities in respect of suitability of accommodation, including Suitability Orders, case law, and the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018. This policy does not apply to offers of accommodation under Part VI of the Act.
3. This document has been drafted with careful consideration of the Equality Act 2010 and the Children's Act 2004, S11.
4. The factors taken into account in determining the right and right accommodation is the suitability of a property for the household and considering whether it is affordable while being able to prioritise essentials such as food, clothing, heating, transport and other essentials. The Council will take account of costs resulting from the location of the accommodation as well the distance from the borough.
5. All decisions regarding the offer accommodation will have regard to the provisions of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2012.
6. The Council is committed to securing suitable temporary accommodation (TA) and Private Rented Accommodation (PRSO) for homeless households where this is required and the policy is to provide accommodation wherever reasonably practicable, except in cases where there is a specific reason why the household should not be accommodated within the borough itself (e.g. those at risk of violence).
7. This Policy sets out that Southwark does not have sufficient supply of accommodation within its own stock, and as a result, it will rely on a supply of privately owned properties to meet our statutory obligations. Therefore, locating homes within Southwark or close proximity is subject to the supply and availability of suitable and affordable homes.

8. Changes to the Local Housing Allowance, the introduction of the “benefit cap” and a number of other factors have reduced the number of properties in South East London that can be obtained for this purpose due to the cost of doing so. As a result, there will be an increasing need to use accommodation that will be some distance away.
9. This policy is intended to ensure that it prioritise those who have the greatest need to be in or close to a particular location.
10. We have set out the location of accommodation according to three geographical zones:
 - Zone A: Southwark and close locality
 - Zone B: Greater London and surrounding counties transport links
 - Zone C: Outside of London
11. Properties for rent in the private sector
12. A Personalised Housing Plan (PHP) will be completed with the household in parallel to and in some instances after a Prevention or Relief Duty being accepted. The PHP is a live document that sets out what steps that the household can take to prevent or relieve homelessness and may include advice about where to look for properties to rent.
13. Southwark has on-going relationships with a variety of providers and the majority of the available homes comes from these providers.
14. Southwark will aim to prevent and relieve homelessness through assisting households to stay in their accommodation. Where this is not possible, we will also seek to make a suitable offer in the private sector. In doing so, a private landlord will offer an assured short-hold tenancy for at least a 24 month period. This also applies to households where the council has accepted a full housing duty to provide permanent accommodation.
15. We will make one offer of private accommodation and in doing so, we will ensure the property is suitable based on the individual households circumstances. The assessment will consider affordability, safety, medical needs, location needs and any other relevant circumstances. Where possible we will also consider area’s of preference listed by the household. Where a suitable offer has been made, we will provide a notification letter to the household advising our statutory duty has ended, this is regardless of whether the offer is accepted or not.
16. We will encourage and support residents to also conduct independent searches to enable the household to exercise choice for their new home. Once a property has been found, we will help the household to determine the affordability of the accommodation and provide appropriate assistance to secure the accommodation. This could be through an incentive payment directly to the landlord.

Part B: Suitability Assessment

17. The Council has a duty to prepare a suitability assessment and will do so in collaboration with the household. Without the household's input the Council will potentially miss vital information or not give it the appropriate weight to relevant factors.
18. In most circumstances this assessment must be completed by the Council before the offer of accommodation is made. In an emergency, the Council may just need the most pertinent facts but must carry out the full assessment as soon as possible.
19. As examples of factors relevant to the assessment and specifically relevant to a household:
 - Any prevailing risk factors.
 - Where the household's children go to school and whether they have any special educational needs
 - Whether the children have national exams in the next six months
 - Whether anyone in the household has any health needs, the NHS service used and treatment received
 - Location of place of work, travelling method, hours of employment and take home pay
 - Benefits entitlement including in-work benefits
 - Access to local services or provision from social services or statutory care package

(A comprehensive indication of factors to be taken into account of are set out further below) As part of the assessment process, the council will develop a personal housing plan. At this point the council will seek key information relating to the households circumstances and requirements. It must be noted that while the council will obtain an applicant's views and wishes, the council will make the placement based on the suitability assessment. Ensuring the details of the assessment have been provided to the household.

How the Council finds and allocates temporary accommodation

20. The Council's Accommodation Procurement Policy for Homeless Households sets out how it obtains accommodation.
21. The Council aims to offer accommodation within the Borough or immediate proximity (Zone A). However, Southwark and South East London are ever increasingly expensive and highly sought-after places and the Council will use the relevant factors to prioritise allocation in Zone A. Where it is not possible to offer accommodation in Zone A, the Council will look further afield in Zones B or C, taking into account the household's circumstances.

22. When considering a specific offer the Council also carries out a search of property websites to see if there are properties in borough or neighbouring boroughs which are affordable and suitable. If such a property can be procured it will be offered. However, the gap between what rent assistance can be claimed and the rent charged it is likely that it will not be affordable. The council will evidence this in the offer letter.

Part C: Allocation process

23. There are a huge number of factors to consider when allocating a property – size, does it have stairs, where is it located, is it ‘nightly booked’ or ‘longer term’, how close it is to public transport links etc.. The Council takes all these issues into account when making an offer. Whilst it is desirable to offer everyone a property in Southwark, this is not possible. Therefore, Zone A properties will be first considered for those that have been assessed as requiring a Zone A offer for specific needs. Level access properties will usually be offered to those who have severe mobility needs or where someone uses a wheelchair.

24. Every day, the Temporary Accommodation Placement team obtains a list of all the properties that are available from various suppliers. In the first instance, the team will check households who are waiting for an offer of suitable temporary accommodation to matches each available property prioritising those in accordance with the “next available offer” status, those requiring a transfer and those short term accommodation.

25. On the occasions where we receive a property that is in particularly short supply, such as a very large home or a longer term, in-borough home and we do not have a family who has been assessed for that type of home waiting, we may decide to hold that property back until a family that really needs it comes to our attention. This is because we know that it may be a long time before another property of that type becomes available again and given the heavy demand we face from homeless families who need housing, it is very likely that in the next few days a family will come in whose need for that particular home are greater than those waiting at that point.

Part D: Placements according to the Geographical Areas (ZONES)

26. Every household’s circumstances are different and we consider everyone’s situations on a case by case basis taking into account the full range of needs that the household has based on the both the suitability assessment and Personal Housing Plan.

27. The Council identifies the needs of households and requirement of remaining in the borough or as close to and has identified the three zones listed below:

Zone A – Southwark and adjacent locality - This refers to areas bordering the borough that may be closer or more accessible than some part of the borough.

- If anyone in the household has a severe and enduring health condition requiring intensive and enduring specialist medical treatment only available at a Southwark's NHS service.
- If anyone in the household are in receipt of a significant care package and a range of healthcare options which cannot be transferred.
- If anyone in the household has a severe and enduring mental health problem who are receiving psychiatric treatment and aftercare provided by local community mental health services and have an established 2 support network where a transfer of care would severely impact upon their ability to engage with treatment and care plans.
- Households containing a child or children with special educational needs who are receiving education or educational support at a local school in or in a neighbouring borough and where a change to another school or learning establishment would be detrimental to their continuing development.
- Households with a child(ren) subject to a Southwark Child Protection Plan or families/pregnant women who have high social needs who are linked into local support services and where it is verified that a transfer to another area could be detrimental to their welfare.
- Applicants who are currently employed in borough and who have been continuously employed for at least six months and where financial assessment confirms the cost of travel would render accommodation in another area unaffordable. Each case will be assessed on an individual basis.
- Pregnant women who are on maternity leave but who intend to return to work at their place of employment will also be considered under the criteria
- Households who have a longstanding arrangement to provide care and support to another family member in Southwark who is not part of the resident household and would be likely to require statutory health and social support if the care ceased.
- The household is receiving services locally and support can not be transferred to another area and in doing so would severely disrupt essential caring and support arrangements.
- Any other special circumstance will also be taken into account.

Zone B: London area and adjoining Counties with reasonable travel connections

- Applicants who have been continuously employed in at a single location in Greater London for a period of six months, and for 16 hours or more per week where financial assessment confirms the cost of travel would render

accommodation in another area unaffordable. Each case will be assessed on an individual basis. Women who are on maternity leave from employment and meet the above criteria would also be prioritised for placements in Greater London.

- Applicants who have as part of their household, a child or children who are enrolled in public examination courses in Southwark, with exams to be taken within the next six months or at a Key Stage assessment.
- Where a child is currently in a public exam year, we will seek to ensure that any accommodation offered is within reasonable travelling distance of school so they can continue their studies uninterrupted.
- Any other special circumstance will be taken into account.

Zone C: Greater London and outside London

- Non-working (or less than 16h) households.
- Households with children at nursery, primary or secondary school, who are not sitting public exams.
- The household is receiving services locally but support could be transferred to another area without severely disrupting caring arrangements.
- Households who are not considered a priority for accommodation in Band A or B will be considered for an offer of accommodation elsewhere in London or outside London (if accommodation has not been identified that is closer)

Vulnerabilities

28. Our scheme sets out how we determine who gets priority for in-borough temporary accommodation, when there is not enough available for everyone.

29. We also have a monthly liaison meeting with Children's Services where we discuss the needs of those families we know are threatened with homelessness so we can jointly plan how best to meet their housing and support needs in the future.

30. The Council recognises that in many cases it may be in the best interests of children to remain at existing schools where they are settled. Unfortunately due to the difficulties in procuring accommodation referred to above it is not always possible to offer accommodation which avoids the need for parents to consider moving their child's school and we have to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable children.

31. If children are not sitting a national exam and do not have any special needs, households may decide that moving their child(ren) to a school nearer to the temporary accommodation may be preferable to travelling back and forward. It will be our duty to determine that the accommodation provided is not for a short period and that the household will be able to plan for the longer term. It is also our duty to ensure that we have confirmed that places are available at local schools subject to specific admission criteria for some schools. The council, where possible, will seek to minimise the disruption to the education.

32. Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires that all local authorities provide school places for all resident children. Before a household accepts and moves to the new address, we will have advised the household of the local schools' availability. The councils will provide support through our Resettlement team to access application forms, connect to local support and any other relevant support required. The Council recognises that pregnant women and new mothers could be especially vulnerable when facing homelessness. Therefore we will ensure extra support is provided through also through our resettlement services. Where any special circumstances are identified, we will look at available options to transfer the household into alternative suitable temporary accommodation when it becomes available.

Part E: Temporary accommodation offer

33. Applicants will be given one offer of suitable interim and one offer of temporary accommodation in compliance with this policy and meets the Southwark Good Homes Standard. Where the council is not able to rehouse applicants into accommodation that meets the good homes standard, they will be placed in emergency interim temporary accommodation. The household will be placed on the internal temporary accommodation transfer list. Upon making an offer they will be given a reasonable amount of time to consider the offer. In making the offer, individual circumstances will be considered, taking into account the factors set out in Part D of this policy and the council's criteria on out of borough placements.
34. If we allocate suitable accommodation on an interim basis and the council subsequently accepts a full housing duty, the accommodation provided may be deemed suitable and no further offers will be required.
35. Households will be given an opportunity to view accommodation that is offered although this will not always be possible on all initial emergency placements. In some circumstances, households may initially virtually view through an up to date recording. Applicants will then be required to decide whether they accept the offer and the council will outline the consequences of any refusals. Where a household has made an offer of accommodation, the council will also make direct with the household in order to discuss the property offered. In doing so, the council will seek feedback from and make reference to the suitability assessment as referenced in Part B above.
36. Where households are placed outside of the borough and further afield, outside of London and not had the ability view the property in advance of acceptance, the council will ensure applicants have sufficient information about the location and services in the local area. Pressures in the housing market may not always permit the council the ability provide residents with a specific timeframe to make a decision on the accommodation. However where possible, the council will consider the individual households circumstances when determining the length of time available to the household before making a decision on whether to accept the offer.

37. Where the person is dissatisfied with an offer of temporary accommodation (which may include out of borough placements), they can lodge a review providing the reasons. This applies to new applicants to whom the Council has an interim duty to accommodate under Section 188 (1) of the HA96, those where the council exercise their discretion to accommodate under Section 188 (3) of the Housing Act 1996, as well as those seeking a transfer from existing TA.
38. There are a number of ways that the council can end its accommodation duties to an applicant, set out in the Housing Act 1996; including by making a 'final' stage offer of accommodation. It will be made clear whether an offer of accommodation is temporary or is intended to be a 'final' stage including an offer as defined in the Private Rented Sector Offers Policy for Homeless Households.
39. Where an applicant to whom the council has accepted a main housing duty and refuse a suitable offer, the council will inform the household in writing that its statutory obligations have been discharged. In this case, the household will also receive a notice terminating the temporary accommodation tenancy. Households can submit a review request and request an extension to the TA provision pending the outcome of the review, they will only continue to be accommodated during the review period for exceptional reasons.
40. Each case will be considered on an individual basis, carrying out a balancing exercise, taking into account the overall merits of the case. This includes the extent to which it could be said that the decision was contrary to the merits of the case or was one which was finely balanced, any new material which could have a real effect on the decision under review, the personal circumstances of the applicant and the consequences of an adverse decision, and the potential impact of the loss of accommodation.

Part F: Temporary Accommodation Transfers

41. There will be instances where the Council has been unable to allocate a property in the agreed Zone and when this occurs, balancing that the accommodation may be suitable for the short term, the household will be agreed for a transfer to move to alternative suitable temporary accommodation. The offer of accommodation may also have been deemed to be unsuitable following review or the household's circumstances have changed resulting in the accommodation is no longer suitable. To address these eventualities, the council maintains a transfer list.
42. The Council will always need to ensure that it has a clear process for managing transfers and how it maximises the suitable allocation of available properties according to geographical location, size and type.

43. Priority between households on the transfer list will be determined by the reasons for transfer, urgency, personal circumstances and considering the availability of the current accommodation occupied.
44. Where there are exceptional circumstances, the Housing Supply Manager can prioritise any household above another and allocate the next available property.
45. The Council recognise that it needs keep track of households who need to move and their needs, and a list or database is useful. However, we will not prioritise households for a transfer simply by time spent on such a list without regard to the specifics of their case. We will monitor the transfer list on a daily and weekly basis to update and distinguish between those in accommodation that is unsuitable now and applicants whom the council considers will need to move in the short or medium term.