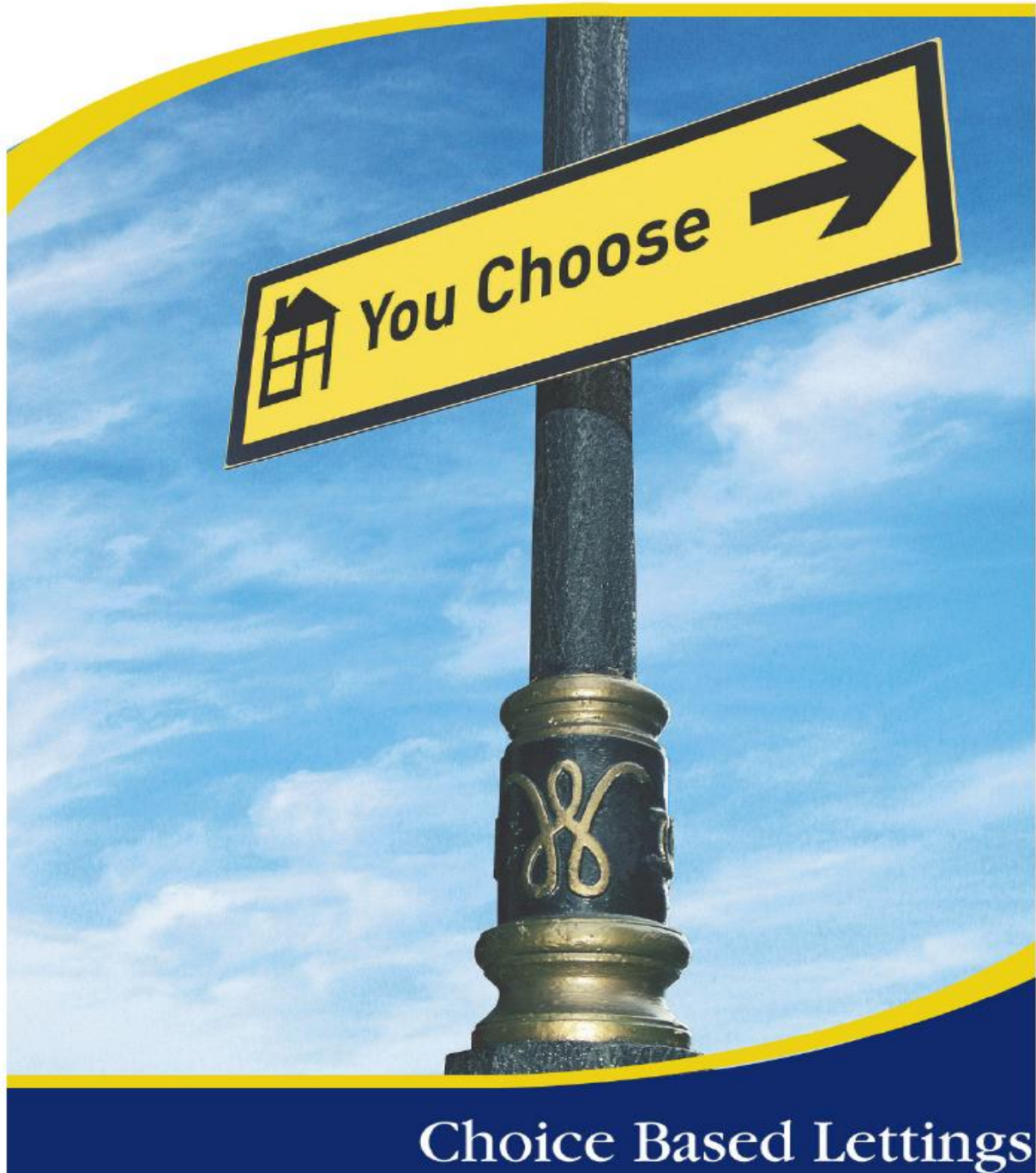




City of Westminster



Choice Based Lettings

**Housing Allocation Scheme
October 2011 Summary**

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Introduction

Summary of Allocation Scheme 2011

This is a summary of Westminster City Council's Housing Allocation Scheme, re-issued in October 2011. The full Housing Allocation Scheme is published on the Council's website at www.westminster.gov.uk/services/housing/housingoptions or available from;

Sally Nott, Housing Needs Commissioning Team
Westminster City Hall
64 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QP
E-mail: sanott@westminster.gov.uk

Housing policy, including the allocation of housing, is made and amended by the Cabinet Member for Housing. At the time of writing, this is Councillor Jonathan Glanz.

The Housing Options Service, which includes the allocation function, is provided by Residential Management Group (RMG) Ltd on behalf of the City Council at 101 Orchardson Street, London NW8 8EA. The service is open at the following times;

Office: Monday-Friday 10:00-16:00 (excluding bank holidays)

Email: hoscustomerservices@cwh.org.uk

Telephone: 0207 641 1000 Monday-Friday 09:00-17:00 (excluding bank holidays)

1. Choice Based Lettings (page 14-17 of full scheme)

Since November 2004 the Council has operated a Choice Based Lettings scheme for priority applicants. Most Council owned and Registered Provider (Housing Association) properties to which the Council has nomination rights are advertised to eligible applicants on the City Council's housing register. Applicants place bids for the properties they are interested in and the bidder with the highest priority is offered the property.

Westminster Council may in certain circumstances make direct offers to applicants and we may discharge our housing duty through making one direct offer of suitable accommodation.

We may also in exceptional circumstances decide not to offer a tenancy to the highest bidder where it would not be in the interest of the applicant, another party, or the good management of housing stock.

2. Bidding Process (page 28-30 of full scheme)

Applicants will be eligible to participate in the bidding process if they;

- have been assessed by the Housing Options Service and;
- been approved for re-housing following the assessment
- are placed in one of the Priority Groups for re-housing
- are not in arrears of rent/occupation charges
- have not been excluded from bidding for any other reason

Applicants who do not come into a priority group will not be able to participate.

Applicants eligible to bid will be issued with a confidential PIN (Personal Identification Number) and User ID (Identification) number for expressing an interest in a property.

Properties that are available for letting through Choice Based Lettings will be advertised to eligible bidders on a weekly basis on the Home Connections website. It is the responsibility of each bidder to ensure they check the advertisements each week to see whether bidding is open to their list. Details of access to the website and to making bids are set out in the CBL bidding guide available from the Housing Options Service.

The Council will normally shortlist the three highest priority bidders to view each property. At the viewing, the bidders will be asked if they are interested in accepting the property. Subject to certain exceptions (see section 2.2 of the full Allocation Scheme), the bidder with the highest priority and points will be invited to sign the tenancy agreement within a specified period.

If bidders are still equal:

- the bidder with the earliest registration date will be invited to sign the tenancy agreement; or if still equal
- the bidder in the priority group appearing first in the tables on pages 6 and 7 of this summary will be invited to sign

If there is still equality or in the event of a dispute, the Director of Housing has the ultimate discretion to decide to whom an offer should be made.

3. Time Limited Bidding (page 15 of full scheme)

Applicants may be given a specific bidding time in which to bid successfully. If they are not successful within the bidding period they will be given one direct offer of suitable accommodation. If the applicant refuses the direct offer the Council may discharge their housing duty to them and they may have to find their own accommodation.

4. Arrears (page 31-33 of full scheme)

Applicants with rent arrears or temporary accommodation charge arrears above certain levels will be unable to participate in Choice Based Lettings. They will continue to be able to view property advertisements but will be unable to bid unless and until the arrears are cleared. Applicants will also be ineligible to be made direct offers of accommodation.

The Director of Housing may exercise discretion in exceptional circumstances to allow applicants with rent or temporary accommodation charge arrears to bid or to receive offers.

5. Distribution of properties between priority groups (page 6 of full scheme)

An annual report to the Cabinet Member for Housing reviews the supply and allocation of the Council's housing stock and Registered Provider stock to which the Council has nomination rights. Projections are made to show how the expected supply of housing for the year ahead is intended to be distributed between the priority re-housing groups.

The outcome of the bidding is monitored during the year and if some groups are not getting the expected proportion of properties, any imbalance will be addressed by, for example, advertising certain properties exclusively to certain priority groups. Therefore, from time to time some groups will be unable to bid during the year.

6. Priority Groups and Points (page 18-25 of full scheme)

The scheme sets out priority points for applicants requiring family sized accommodation (page 6) and applicants requiring studio/1-bedroom accommodation (page 7). The purpose of the points is to give reasonable preference to certain groups as required by law and to assist other groups of applicants. Applications consisting of a household with a child/children will have 10 more points than an all adult household to reflect the needs of children.

The main priority groups are shown below (for descriptions of the individual lists within these priority groups please refer to the relevant sections in the full Allocation Scheme);

- Under-occupiers (Cash Incentive Scheme - Westminster Council tenants only)
- Pressing Housing Need (such as Management Transfers)
- Medical
- Overcrowding
- Homeless
- Older People (aged 60+ eligible for Community Supportive Housing)

Table 1 (The table below is subject to the exceptions to be found within the scheme)

Points for Family Sized Accommodation							
				Additional Points			Points Deducted
Priority Group		Priority List	Priority Points	Employment	Residence	Stage 2 Lease End	All Adult Household
Underoccupation	Transfer List	Cash Incentive	550	-	-	-	-
Pressing Housing Need	Transfer List	Management Transfer, Decants, Community Care Nominations, Children Act Panel, Learning Disabilities	450	-	-	-	-
	Waiting List	Succession/Assignment, RP Decants, Reciprocal, Community Care Nominations, Children Act Panel, Learning Disabilities	400	-	-	-	-
Medical (people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including grounds relating to disability)	Transfer List	Medical	250	50	50	-	-
	Waiting List	Medical	200	50	50	-	-
Overcrowding (People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions)	Waiting List	Registered Provider Quota	300	-	-	-	-
		HHSRS band A Hazard or Part X Housing Act 1985	250	50	50	-	-10
	Transfer List	HHSRS band A Hazard or Part X Housing Act 1985	300	50	50	-	-10
		Lacking 3 bedrooms	300	50	50	-	-10
		Lacking 2 bedrooms	200	50	50	-	-10
		Lacking 1 bedroom	100	50	50	-	-10
Homeless (as defined in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 167(2) of the Housing Act 1996)			150	50	50	200	-

Table 2 (The table below is subject to the exceptions to be found within the scheme)

Points for Studio and 1-Bedroom Accommodation			
	Priority List	Priority Points	High Priority Medical/Welfare Points
General Needs Housing	Cash Incentive	550	-
	Decants, Management Transfers	450	-
	Social Services Nominations (Tenants) (including Community Care Nominations, Children Act Panel, Children Leaving Care and Learning Disabilities)	450	-
	Social Services Nominations (Waiting List) (including Community Care Nominations, Children Act Panel, Children Leaving Care, Learning Disabilities and Mental Health Hostel Quota)	400	-
	Registered Provider Decant	400	-
	Reciprocals	400	-
	Succession/Assignment	400	-
	Tenants (Studio to 1-bed)	350	-
	Medical (Transfers)	250	-
	Medical (Waiting List)	200	-
	Homeless	150	-
	Hostel Move On/Street Homeless/Drug Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)	50	-
	Pathway Housings	50	-
Community Supportive Housing	Cash Incentive	550	50
	Decants (Tenants)	450	50
	Decants (Registered Provider)	400	50
	Succession/Assignment	400	50
	Council Tenants	200	50
	Homeless	150	50
	Waiting List Applicants (including Pathway Housings)	50	50
	Incoming Nominations	50	50

7. Mobility Criteria (page 26-27 of full scheme)

All applicants eligible to participate in Choice Based Lettings will be assessed to see what type of property matches their mobility and access requirements. All applicants and all properties will be given a Mobility Category.

Mobility Category Applicants

Category 1	Applicants who use a wheelchair all the time.
Category 2	Applicants who need a home which is wheelchair accessible but may not need to use it inside the home.
Category 3	Applicants with severe mobility problems who require a ground floor or lifted property with level access and no internal stairs.
Category 4	All other applicants.

Property Mobility Category

Category 1	Property is fully wheelchair accessible.
Category 2	Property is suitable for a person who needs a wheelchair outside the home but can manage in the home without a wheelchair.
Category 3	Property with no more than 3 steps to access property and no internal stairs. May be lifted.
Category 4	All other properties.

Every application and property is given a 'mobility category' to ensure properties are offered to the most suitable household. For example if a property is suitable for a mobility category 3 applicant, applicants with mobility category 3 will be given priority over an applicant with mobility category 4 even if the applicant with mobility category 4 has more points.

Properties suitable for wheelchair users will not be advertised through CBL. Applicants requiring Mobility Category 1 or 2 properties will be given a direct offer. This is due to the limited supply of this type of property and the relatively small number of people registered for this type of property.

When persons within the same Mobility Category bid for an advertised Mobility Category property, priority will depend upon who has the most points and, if equal, the household that has waited the longest.

8. Medical Priority (Category A) (page 60-63 of full scheme)

Re-housing on medical, welfare and disability grounds normally arises when the housing situation **seriously** adversely affects health and the property cannot reasonably be adapted to meet needs and thereby causes the need to move. All cases are considered on individual severity and merit.

A medical adviser will provide an assessment for applicants applying on medical grounds to determine whether the criteria for this Priority Group is met. As part of the assessment consideration will be given to the suitability of the current property and any adaptations that have been carried out. If the housing need is met by the adaptations, or could be met by further alterations, medical priority may not be awarded.

Westminster Council tenants, Registered Provider tenants and households living in private sector rented accommodation can apply for priority on medical grounds. Accepted homeless applicants are placed in temporary accommodation that is suitable for their needs and those with medical grounds for a move will be assessed to determine the mobility category that applies to the household.

Applicants in private rented accommodation will be assisted to find alternative private sector accommodation in order to relieve or alleviate the existing need. Where it is not possible to find a private sector home to meet the households needs they may be placed on the Medical Priority List.

9. Overcrowding (page 64-66 of full scheme)

Westminster Council Tenants - are given points to reflect the level of overcrowding in their household. They are given points for each additional bedroom they require.

Severely overcrowded households who are assessed as a Band A hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), or assessed as being statutorily overcrowded, will qualify for the highest number of overcrowding points. See appendix V of the full scheme for the definition of statutory overcrowding.

Only people included on the application will be taken into account when assessing if a household meets the HHSRS or statutory overcrowding criteria. Section 2.12 of the full scheme sets out who can be included on a transfer application.

Additional priority will be given to households with children (under 18 yrs old) by deducting ten points from all adult households.

Registered Provider (Housing Association) Tenants - who live in Westminster, can be nominated to Westminster Council for a move to a larger home if they are overcrowded. The Registered Provider will decide which households to nominate but this will usually be households who are severely overcrowded and have been assessed either as a Band A hazard under HHSRS or are statutorily overcrowded. See section 6.1.11 of the full Allocation Scheme for details of the Registered Provider Quota.

Private Sector Tenants – who live in private rented accommodation and who are statutorily overcrowded will not be eligible to join this Priority Group but will be assisted to find alternative private sector accommodation of the correct

size in order to relieve or alleviate the existing housing need. Where it is not possible to find a private sector home to meet the households needs they may be placed on the Overcrowded Priority List.

Homeless - Overcrowded households living in temporary accommodation will be registered for a transfer to a larger temporary home. An offer will be made when a suitable property becomes available.

10. Mobility Schemes (page 72 of full scheme)

There are national mobility schemes such as Homeswapper that may be available to social housing tenants who do not come within the Priority Groups. Applicants can register directly and in some cases Registered Providers pay the registration fee on behalf of their tenants. Westminster Council tenants can register for free.

11. Community Supportive Housing for Older People (page 73 of full scheme)

In 2010 the Council reclassified it's sheltered and supported accommodation as Community Supportive Housing. To be eligible for Community Supportive Housing single applicants or couples must be aged 60 years old or over. Cases are assessed on an individual basis and where a frail applicant under 60 years old is applying the minimum age of 55 years old will be considered.

A Joint Assessment Panel for Older Persons (JAPOP) considers all requests for re-housing from older people. JAPOP is made up of officers from the Housing Options Service, Social & Community Services and Scheme Managers. The panel determines the support needs of applicants applying for Community Supportive Housing.

12. Size of Accommodation Offered (page 77-78 of full scheme)

Applicants will be able to bid for properties that have one bedroom less than they are entitled to, provided this does not result in statutory overcrowding.

Households may bid for properties up to two bedrooms smaller than they are entitled to, provided this does not result in the property being statutorily overcrowded.

If the property belongs to a Registered Provider (RP) the household must meet the requirements of the RP's bedroom standard.

A case management approach will be taken for households who require a 3-bedroom property or larger. Household members may be offered separate housing in smaller properties and will receive one direct offer. Applicants will not be able to bid for properties larger than they need, subject to discretion in exceptional cases.

The Councils bedroom standard is set out below.

A single person is entitled to a studio ie one bedsitting room, kitchen, bathroom/WC.

Couples are entitled to one bedroom and a living room, kitchen, bathroom/WC. However, couples living in a studio will not be considered to be overcrowded.

Two adult siblings of the same sex are entitled to one bedroom and separate living room, kitchen, bathroom/WC and it is expected they will use the bedroom and living room as two bed-sitting rooms.

Larger households are entitled to a living room, kitchen, bathroom/WC and each of the following will be allocated one bedroom;

Adults	An applicant or an applicant and partner
	Two siblings of the same sex where the age gap is ten years or less
	An adult who is not the partner or same-sex sibling of the applicant (although such household members may instead, at the discretion of the Council, be offered separate re-housing in a studio or in Community Supportive Housing)
	An adult who is accepted by the Council to be the carer for a person assessed as needing full time care and not the partner or same-sex sibling of the applicant
Children	Two children of the opposite sex under ten
	Two children of the same sex where the age gap is ten years or less
	One child (not coming into the above categories)

13. Offers and Refusals of Offers (page 79-80 of full scheme)

Subject to the restrictions set out below or otherwise contained in the full scheme, there is no limit to the number of properties that an applicant may bid for under Choice Based Lettings.

If an applicant is shortlisted for more than three properties in the same week, they will only be allowed to view three and will be asked to choose which three they wish to view. They must respond promptly when asked or otherwise the Council may exercise its discretion and decide that they have lost the right to view one or more of those properties or decide on their behalf which ones they should view.

Applicants may refuse the property at the viewing stage and continue to be able to bid for other properties. However, if an applicant signs a tenancy but refuses or fails to move in, they will be unable to bid for properties for up to six months.

Applicants who refuse the maximum number of direct offers to which they are entitled may have their housing application closed.

Refusal of an offer by a homeless person owed a duty under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 can lead to a cessation of that duty. The statutory provisions will apply.

Applicants requiring mobility category 1 or 2 properties (suitable for wheelchair users) will receive one direct offer only. In cases where the needs of the household as assessed by the Council's occupational therapist are so specific due for example to the adaptations required, the size or the location, that suitable properties will be rare or will need to be specially adapted, the Council will make a direct offer of suitable housing and should this be refused, the applicant's priority for re-housing will end.

14. Information and Reviews (page 81 of full scheme)

Applicants have the right to request internal reviews of certain decisions relating to homelessness and the housing register. These will be carried out by the Housing Options Service.

The Service will also provide on request information to applicants as to;

- Which, if any, priority group they are in
- Their points and position in that group
- The estimated number of properties of the size required by the applicant expected to become available for letting during that financial year.

Please note this is a summary of the Allocation Scheme published in October 2011 and cannot cover all situations and exceptions. For further information or a copy of the full Allocation Scheme 2011, please see details on page 3.

Appendix I

Am I Eligible for Housing in Westminster?

Are you...	Westminster Council Tenants	Registered Provider (Housing Association) Tenants	Private Sector Applicants
<p>Living in a property too large for your needs?</p>	<p>Westminster Council tenants can apply to move to a smaller property through the Cash Incentive Scheme (CIS). You can contact your local estate office or the Housing Options Service (HOS) for assistance.</p>	<p>If you want to move to a smaller property you should speak to your landlord. They might give you priority for a transfer.</p>	<p>If your privately rented home is too large for your family, it may be in your financial interest to consider renting a small home. If you make a claim for housing benefit, there is likely to be a restriction on the amount of benefit you can claim for the property but you will still be liable for the full rent.</p> <p>You can contact the Housing Options Service if you would like advice on finding a smaller home in the private sector. Your landlord or letting agent may be able to assist you with moving to a smaller home.</p>
<p>Needing to move for medical/health reasons?</p>	<p>Westminster Council tenants can apply for a transfer on medical grounds. However medical priority will only be awarded if your health or the health of any other household member is seriously affected by the living conditions. If a member of the household is disabled, medical priority would only be given if the property cannot be adapted to meet the person's need.</p>	<p>Although RP tenants can apply to Westminster for housing on medical grounds, households are unlikely to be given a priority for housing. In most cases you will be referred back to your landlord to apply for a move under their own transfer scheme.</p> <p>You will only be eligible to be assessed by Westminster if your accommodation is wholly unsuitable for health or welfare reasons and</p>	<p>Applicants in private rented accommodation will be assisted to find alternative private sector accommodation in order to relieve or alleviate the existing need.</p> <p>Where it is not possible to find a private sector home to meet your needs households may be placed on the Medical Priority List.</p>

	<p>Applicants will be asked to complete a Medical Assessment form, which can be obtained from the Housing Options Service. Our Medical Advisor will request additional medical information from the person's health professionals is necessary. We will advise you of our decision in writing.</p>	<p>your landlord is unable to offer you a transfer within their own housing stock.</p>	
<p>Overcrowded?</p>	<p>Westminster council tenants will be eligible for a transfer to a larger home if they are overcrowded. Households will be given points to reflect the level of overcrowding in the property.</p> <p>Those who are assessed either as a Band A hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) or as being statutory overcrowded will receive the highest number of overcrowding points.</p> <p>All adult households will have 10 points deducted in order to give some additional priority to households with children.</p>	<p>Overcrowded tenants of Registered Providers who live in Westminster can be nominated to the Council by their landlord.</p> <p>Your landlord will decide who to nominate, but it will usually be households who are severely overcrowded and have been assessed as a Band A hazard under the Housing Health and Safety rating system, or assessed as being statutory overcrowded.</p>	<p>If your privately rented home is too large for your family, it may be in your financial interest to consider renting a smaller home. If you make a claim for housing benefit there is likely to be a restriction on the amount of benefit you can claim for the property but you will still be liable for the full rent.</p> <p>You can contact the Housing Options Service if you would like advice on finding a smaller home in the private sector. Your landlord or letting agent may be able to assist you with moving to a smaller home.</p>
<p>Threatened with homelessness?</p>	<p>Anyone including Westminster Council tenants can make a homeless application if they are threatened with losing their home.</p> <p>However, depending on the</p>	<p>Anyone including RP tenants can make a homeless application if they are threatened with losing their home.</p> <p>However, depending on the</p>	<p>If you live in the private sector and are threatened with becoming homeless you can approach the Housing Options Service (HOS) for advice about the options that are available to you. One option would</p>

<p>circumstances we may not have a legal duty to provide you with another home. Our housing duty to you will depend on the reasons why you are either at risk of losing, or have actually lost your home.</p> <p>The Housing Options Service will investigate your application and decide if we are required by law to provide you with another home.</p> <p>If you decide to visit the service you will need to bring the following documents with you;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of identification for everyone in your household e.g. passport and full birth certificate • Proof of actual or imminent homelessness e.g. Court orders • Proof of income e.g. wage slips, bank statements or benefit entitlement <p>Other documents may be required but you will be advised of this during your initial or subsequent interviews.</p>	<p>circumstances we may not have a legal duty to provide you with another home. Our housing duty to you will depend on the reasons why you are either at risk of losing, or have actually lost your home.</p> <p>A decision will be made following a full investigation into your circumstances. You can get initial advice by contacting the Housing Options Service.</p> <p>If you decide to visit the service you will need to bring the following documents with you;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of identification for everyone in your household e.g. passport and full birth certificate • Proof of actual or imminent homelessness e.g. Court orders • Proof of income e.g. wage slips, bank statements or benefit entitlement <p>Other documents may be required but you will be advised of this during your initial or subsequent interviews.</p>	<p>be for you to make a homeless application.</p> <p>If you decide to make a homeless application you will be assessed under the Housing Act 1996 and we will decide if we have a legal duty to assist you with securing alternative accommodation.</p> <p>A decision will be made following a full investigation into your circumstances. You can get initial advice by contacting HOS.</p> <p>If you decide to visit the service you will need to bring the following documents with you;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of identification for everyone in your household e.g. passport and full birth certificate • Proof of actual or imminent homelessness e.g. Court orders • Proof of income e.g. wage slips, bank statements or benefit entitlement <p>Other documents may be required but you will be advised of this during your initial or subsequent interviews.</p>
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<p>Needing to move for other reasons?</p>	<p>You may have reasons for wanting a transfer that are not covered in any of the above information. For example;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you may be in fear of violence from in or outside your home. • You might be experiencing harassment or nuisance from your neighbours. • Your property may be in disrepair. <p>This list is not exhaustive but you should contact your housing officer at your local estate office to discuss these or similar problems.</p> <p>They will be able to advise you on the appropriate course of action. In the most serious cases, you could be approved for an urgent management transfer.</p>	<p>You may have reasons for wanting a transfer that are not covered in any of the above information. For example;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you may be in fear of violence from in or outside your home. • You might be experiencing harassment or nuisance from your neighbours. • Your property may be in disrepair. <p>This list is not exhaustive but you should contact your landlord to discuss these or similar problems.</p> <p>They will be able to advise you on the appropriate course of action. In the most serious cases, you could be approved for an urgent transfer.</p>	<p>You may have reasons for wanting to move to another home that are not covered in the above information. For example;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you may be in fear of violence from in or outside your home. • You might be experiencing harassment or nuisance from your neighbours. • Your property may be in disrepair. <p>In some situations it might be appropriate to discuss the problem with your landlord, if for example there is a repair or maintenance problem. In other situations you might need to get independent advice.</p> <p>The Housing Options Service has specialist officers that can offer advice/assistance on a range of landlord and tenant issues.</p>