

Allocations in social housing

Council housing scheme in Brent

Key information

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Introduction

The London Assembly Housing Committee is investigating how social housing is allocated in the capital.

Objectives

- To understand the variation of social housing allocation policies across local authorities in London, including the extent to which policies are applied equitably and make the best use of available housing.
- To assess how effective the Mayor's London Housing Strategy has been in shaping social housing allocation policies across councils.
- To scrutinise the effectiveness of the Mayor's Housing Moves scheme and the Seaside and Country Homes programme.
- To identify what role the Mayor could play going forward to improve the allocation of social housing in London.

Key issues

- Waiting lists in London are the highest of any region in England. It is estimated that one in 50 Londoners are homeless and in temporary accommodation ([one in 21 children](#)). The average waiting time is significantly longer for homes in Inner London and for family-sized homes, compared to one-bedroom homes and [those in Outer London boroughs](#).
- Local authorities set their own allocation policies for social housing, resulting in significant differences across London. Councils use either a points-based or banding system to determine who gets priority and how different sized homes are allocated. In Haringey, for example, the criteria for different bands include factors such as having a serious medical condition or living in an under-occupied property.
- Allocation policies seek to make the best use of social housing stock, by freeing up homes for people on waiting lists. This could be to provide people on waiting lists with a home, or to free up larger homes for those in over-occupied social housing. One way this is done is by addressing overoccupancy – when a household lives in a home that is larger than they need.
- Since 2007, fewer social tenants in London have been moving, leading to a decline in the proportion of [social housing lets relative to the total housing stock](#). Allocation policies should seek to address this by tackling overoccupancy and promoting vacancy chains. However, research published by The Smith Institute argues that local authorities are [not currently incentivised or equipped to do this](#).
- Allocation policies are required to comply with the Equality Act 2010. However, there have been successful legal challenges against local authorities where allocation policies (or the application of them) were found to breach this legislation.
- Certain groups on housing waiting lists face greater barriers to social housing, and some experience direct discrimination. In July 2025, analysis of 750,000 UK households recorded by the Heriot-Watt University over a 3-year research project revealed Black families accepted as statutory homeless are [less than half as likely](#) to gain housing as their White counterparts.
- The Mayor cannot dictate local council’s allocation policies, even when homes are funded through City Hall programmes. However, [local authorities are required](#) to have regard for the Mayor’s Housing Strategy when developing their policies.
- The Mayor operates two schemes to support social tenant mobility: Housing Moves; and Seaside and Country Homes. The Housing Moves scheme offers opportunities for domestic abuse victims/survivors and former rough sleepers to relocate within different areas of London. The Seaside and Country Homes is open to social housing tenants in London aged 55 or above the opportunity to move to homes outside of London – [helping to free up properties for those on waiting lists](#).
- Local authorities are required to give preference to households who are statutorily homeless through allocation. However, some do not prescribe specific bands for homeless households and instead incorporate homeless households into bands which consider other factors. This makes it [impossible to determine](#) how long a homeless household can expect to wait before being provided with a secure home.
- In January 2024, the Government launched [a Consultation](#) on reforms to social housing allocations.

Key questions

1. How do social housing allocation policies vary across London boroughs and what different systems of prioritisation for allocation are used?
2. How well do social housing allocation policies reflect local housing need?
3. To what extent are the allocation policies in London, and their implementation, equitable?
4. What changes could London boroughs make to their allocation policies to better support movement between tenures and free up more social housing?

5. Since the London Housing Strategy was published in 2018, how has it influenced allocation policies across London? How has the Mayor worked with councils to support them to implement policies that facilitate inter-tenure mobility?
6. How effective are the Housing Moves and Seaside and County Homes programmes? Are the current eligibility criteria for the Housing Moves programme working?
7. What further role could the Mayor play in improving housing allocation policies in London?

Call for Evidence

As part of this investigation, the London Assembly Housing Committee launched a Call for Evidence.

[Read the written responses in full.](#)

Survey

The Committee would like to hear from Londoners who have applied for or been allocated social housing in the capital.

The findings of the survey will help form the Committee's investigation.

[Take the survey](#)

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