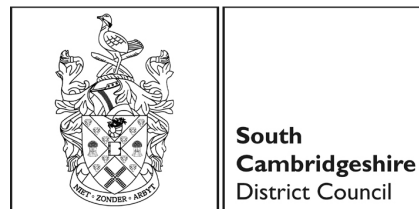


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## DRAFT RESPONSE



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Your ref:  
February 12

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Dear Frances Walker

### **Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England. Consultation**

South Cambridgeshire District Council is part of a wider sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme. Whilst each authority within this scheme has their own lettings policy, we aim to maintain the same key principles for assessing housing need. A review of the lettings policy is currently underway and the aim will be to maintain a consistent approach across the sub region. However, the response below are the views and comments of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Chapter 1

#### **Does your allocation scheme/ transfer policy already provide for social tenants who are under-occupying to be given priority?**

Yes

#### **Do you intend to revise your allocation scheme in order to make it easier for under-occupying social tenants to downsize to more appropriately sized accommodation?**

Yes, we are likely to make further changes to this element of the policy, particularly in light of the welfare reforms which may mean some tenants may not get full housing benefit if they are under-occupying.

#### **If so, what changes will you be considering?**

Increased priority for those under-occupying or greater flexibility to agree a management move on this basis.

Although not forming part of the allocations process, we will also look at the best way to encourage applicants to use the mutual exchange scheme in order to achieve a move to more appropriately sized accommodation.

### Chapter 3

**Do you agree that members of the Armed Forces and former Service personnel should not be disqualified on residency grounds? Is 5 years from the date of discharge an appropriate time limit for this restriction? If not, what would be a more appropriate period?**

We agree with this proposal and the time limit for this restriction. We would like to see guidance on whether this includes bereaved families.

**Does the draft guidance provide sufficient clarity on how to implement the new power for housing authorities to set their own allocations qualification criteria? If not, in what areas would more guidance be useful?**

On the whole, yes – it provides for high levels of flexibility at a local level and it will be a local decision if and who would not constitute a qualifying person. For example, we are unlikely to refuse applications to our Choice Based Lettings scheme due to a new Targeted Housing Options website which will be particularly useful for applicants with low priority for social rented housing, to consider other options available to them. However, from an operational perspective we will make it clear to applicants in the lower bands that their prospects for rehousing are limited.

As mentioned above, we would like guidance on the response to bereaved families of those who have served in the Armed Forces.

### Chapter 4

**Do you agree that the bedroom standard is an appropriate measure of overcrowding for the purpose of according reasonable preference? If not, what measure do you consider would be more appropriate?**

No, we do not feel that this is an appropriate bedroom standard, as this could prevent lower level overcrowding from being addressed and it differs with the room standards used for determining housing benefit. We will be reviewing ours and will be looking at the criteria used by Housing Benefit as this is felt to be more appropriate for the local area. Whilst the bedroom standard may be appropriate in some areas, the assessment used to define overcrowding is not necessary in the guidance other than at a minimum standard.

**Should this guidance provide advice on how to define 'severe overcrowding' for the purpose of according additional preference? If so, would an appropriate measure be two bedrooms or more short of the bedroom standard.**

Priority awarded to overcrowding will differ locally. A minimum is already defined in the criteria for statutory overcrowding. If statutory overcrowding is identified through either the bedroom standard or the space standard not being met, applicants are currently entitled to urgent housing need within our policy. This seems appropriate for our local area and we have not, to date, identified a need to change this element.

**How does your allocation scheme currently define 'overcrowding' for allocations purposes? Does it, for example, use the bedroom standard, the statutory overcrowding standards or another definition?**

Bedroom assessment guidelines in South Cambridgeshire District Council's lettings policy –  
“The list below will be used to assess overcrowding and therefore whether they are lacking any bedrooms in their current home;

- couples require one double bedroom
- single applicants require one bedroom
- non co-habiting joint applicants require two bedrooms
- two children of the same sex under 10 years old require one double bedroom
- if there are three children in one room they will be assessed as lacking one bedroom
- two children of the opposite sex, where the oldest child is aged six years or over require two bedrooms
- two children of the same sex who are both over 10 years old need a bedroom each.
- a pregnant woman expecting her first child requires two bedrooms after 24 weeks of pregnancy”

It would, however, be helpful for the allocations guidance to define when a room is not a room and this could be met through reference to the space standard.

**We propose to regulate to require housing authorities to frame their allocation scheme to provide for former Service personnel with urgent housing needs to be given additional preference for social housing. Do you agree with this proposal?**

We agree with this proposal, and this will be given further consideration during our review of the lettings policy. In this part of the guidance, no time limit is specified here and a more detailed definition of 'former and serving members' is required.

The Council would welcome the inclusion of additional preference for social housing to include bereaved families of service personnel.

**Does your allocation scheme already make use of the flexibilities within the allocation legislation to provide for those who have served in the Armed Forces to be given greater priority for social housing? If so, how does your scheme provide for this?**

No

**If not, do you intend to take advantage of the flexibilities in the allocation legislation to provide for former members of the Armed forces to be given greater priority for social housing? If so, what changes might you be considering?**

Yes, this will form part of our review of the lettings policy. Potential options for implementing this include a flag system for those in urgent housing need or utilising our existing provisions under our policy for an emergency housing status.

In section 4.35 of the guidance it is assumed this is referring to members of the armed forces without an 'urgent' housing need, and we will give further consideration to whether additional priority is awarded to these applicants. However, there is no reference here to the time since applicants have left the army.

Again, we would like to see guidance on whether this includes bereaved families.

**Does your allocation scheme already provide for some priority to be given to people who are in work, seeking work, or otherwise contributing to the community? If so, how does your scheme provide for this?**

Not in general, although in some local lettings plans there is a requirement for a proportion to be in work.

**If not, do you intend to revise your allocation scheme in light of the guidance?**

This will be considered as part of our review of the lettings policy, potentially through prioritising within bands for a proportion of properties.

**Are there other ways in which housing authorities can frame their allocation scheme to meet the needs of prospective adopters and foster carers?**

We have agreed a procedure with our local social services. Bedroom entitlement is increased once adoption has been approved. Applicants provide the lettings team with a copy of their adoption approval letter and at that stage additional bedroom need is assessed and applied, as appropriate.

**Additional comments:**

4.12 (Medical and welfare grounds)

No reference is made here to mental health and we feel this should also be included in the guidance document.

4.22 (Behaviour)

Whilst we agree with the principle of distinguishing between good and bad behaviour, this has the potential to be very resource intensive, however, we recognise this is a flexibility authorities can choose to adopt or not. We do, however, feel there could be significant equality implications by awarding priority to applicants who have demonstrated a contribution to the community as many applicants, for example, those who are disabled or in ill health, may not be in a position to do this as a direct result of their condition.

4.32 (Under-occupation)

We would like this to state that 'landlords', rather than 'authorities' should explore the implications of this [an offer where housing benefit may not meet the full rent] with the household. We feel that landlords should be responsible for providing sufficient guidance in respect of their own policies, and would be concerned about the resource implication if all applicants were directed to the local authority.

**Does the draft guidance provide sufficient clarity on the extent of flexibilities available to housing authorities when framing their allocation scheme?**

On the whole, yes, with the exception of comments noted above.

Yours sincerely

**Cllr Mark Howell**  
Portfolio Holder for Housing