

Local lettings policy for the Allocation of Local Authority Housing Fund properties.

August 2023 – March 2024

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Version: 1
Review/Revision date: April 2024

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1. The Policy

1.1 Introduction

Purpose

The government have provided Southend on Sea City Council (SCC) with a Local Authority Housing Fund' (LAHF) to acquire additional social housing. Under the terms of the LAHF grant, the target eligible cohort are those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, who are also being assisted under the following schemes,

- Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme
- Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- Ukraine Family Scheme
- Homes for Ukraine
- Ukraine extension scheme

Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires all social housing stock to be allocated in accordance with the council's allocations scheme. As prioritising the allocation of LAHF homes to the above groups will require SCC to operate outside its usual Allocations scheme, **we are enacting section 7.19 of our Allocations Policy.** Under section 7.19 of our Allocations Policy, the council may from time to time put in place a time-limited 'local lettings policy'(LLP) that enables some social housing stock to be allocated outside of the usual policy framework, to help address a local housing need.

The local need for LAHF properties arises from war and persecution in Ukraine and Afghanistan, which have resulted in UK government assistance. The government placed some of those being assisted under the Afghan schemes in 'bridging accommodation' (a local hotel) in Southend-on-Sea, as well as other locations across the country. On the 15th May 2023, the government issued all those in Southend's bridging hotel with a notice advising that they would be ending the hotel placement and must find alternative accommodation, therefore increasing the local need for homelessness assistance. At time of policy development there were 19 Afghan scheme households who had been served this notice. In addition, we have 35 households being assisted under the Ukraine schemes and whilst a blanket risk of homelessness does not apply to all of these, some hosting arrangements are, and may continue to break down.

After the immediate needs of the eligible cohort have been addressed, the LAHF properties are intended to support the council's wider housing and homelessness duties.

Scope and exclusions

This policy only covers LAHF properties being let as council housing on introductory, leading to secure council tenancies. It does not cover the allocation of any private rented/Assured Shorthold Tenancies.

1.2 Objectives of LAHF funding

The government's objectives of LAHF funding are as follows:

- Ensure recent humanitarian schemes (Afghan and Ukraine schemes) which offer sanctuary, via an organised safe and legal entry route, to those fleeing conflict, provide sufficient longer term accommodation to those they support.
- Support areas with housing pressures which have generously welcomed substantial numbers of Ukrainian refugees so that these areas are not disadvantaged by

increased pressures from these arrivals on the existing housing and homelessness systems.

- Mitigate the expected increased pressures on local authority homelessness and social housing resources which arise from the eligible cohort as sponsorship/family placements/bridging accommodation arrangements come to an end by increasing the provision of affordable housing available to local authorities to support those in the cohort who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in bridging accommodation;
- Reduce emergency, temporary and bridging accommodation costs;
- Deliver accommodation that as far as possible allows for the future conversion of housing units to support wider local authority housing and homelessness responsibilities to UK nationals (i.e. after usage by this cohort ends);
- Utilise accommodation solutions to enable effective resettlement and economic integration of the eligible cohort.
- Reduce impacts on the existing housing and homelessness systems and those waiting for social housing.

It is up to SCC to decide how to deliver and manage the LAHF fund locally, provided the fund increases the housing available to the target eligible cohort.

Within its Memorandum of Understanding, SCC has agreed with the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to use the LAHF grant to deliver at least 14 properties including:

- At least 2x 4 bed properties to be allocated to Afghan scheme households who were accommodated in Home Office Bridging hotels.
- 12 properties to be targeted at Afghan/Ukraine scheme applicants who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

1.3 Policy detail

1.3.1 Target eligible cohort for LAHF funding

The target eligible cohort to benefit from LAHF funding are those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are being assisted under Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, Ukraine Family Scheme, Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine extension scheme

1.3.2 Eligibility for social housing.

The government has specifically awarded public funds to help mitigate the increased pressures on homelessness services arising from those being assisted under their Afghan and Ukrainian Schemes. In accordance with Regulation 3 of the Eligibility Regulations, and set out in statutory Allocations Guidance, the following persons subject to immigration control are included amongst those eligible for an allocation of social housing:

- a person who has been granted leave by virtue of the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy or the previous scheme for locally-employed staff in Afghanistan
- a person with leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom who left Afghanistan in connection with the collapse of the Afghan government that took place on 15 August 2021 and who is not subject to a condition of no recourse to public funds and has not been given leave to enter or remain as a result of an undertaking that a sponsor would be responsible for the applicant's maintenance and accommodation. However, a person who was sponsored will be eligible for housing assistance if the

applicant has been resident in the Common Travel Area for 5 years since the date of entry (or the date of the sponsorship undertaking, whichever is later) or their sponsor(s) have died

- a person in the United Kingdom who left Ukraine in connection with the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022 and had resided in Ukraine immediately before 1 January 2022, and who has been granted leave in accordance with Immigration Rules made under section 3(2) of the Immigration Act 1971
- a person in the United Kingdom who has limited leave to remain granted in accordance with [Appendix Ukraine Scheme of the Immigration Rules](#) pursuant to an application made by that person from within the United Kingdom

1.3.3 Choice

LAHF social housing will be directly matched to applicants, oppose to inviting applicants to 'bid' (express an interest) for it.

1.3.4 Prioritisation and allocation:

Ukraine/Afghan scheme households being supported by Southend's Resettlement team who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will have a homeless application taken. In addition, anyone being considered for a LAHF property will be required to complete a housing register application and as part of this, complete the declaration on the form confirming the information provided is true and correct. An allocation of LAHF accommodation will not be made to anyone without a housing register application.

- **First priority** will be given to Southend Resettlement Team's households that have had main homelessness duty accepted. (The ability to direct let accommodation to households owed the main homelessness duty also already exists under the council's wider 2019 Allocations Policy).
- **Second priority** will be given to Southend Resettlement Team households that are owed a Homelessness Prevention or Relief Duty. Unlike SCC's wider Allocations Policy, these applicants will not be required to have a Local Connection to Southend to be prioritised for LAHF properties, they will only need to have been residing in a Southend postcode for at least 3 months prior to the allocation.

Within the above categorisations, reasonable endeavours will be made to prioritise households most in need when matching properties. A panel will meet to consider nominations into the LAHF properties.

The panel will consist of:

- The Head of Housing Policy and Operations
- The Housing Solutions Team Leader
- The Housing Register Team Leader
- The Senior Policy and Project Officer
- The Resettlement Coordinator
- The Resettlement Housing Solutions Officer

The panel will consider:

- The profile of LAHF properties presently available.
- The grant funding requirement for at least 2 4bed+ properties to be allocated to Afghan scheme residents who are in/were in bridging accommodation (not Ukraine scheme applicants)

- If SCC have accepted a full homelessness duty – if so, these cases will be prioritised first.
- Date due to become homeless(if not already).
- Bedroom need (As determined by SCC's 2019 Allocations policy)
- Medical/support needs for specific types of properties and impact current arrangements are having.
- Vulnerabilities and support needs of the applicant(s).
- If there is a need to be in a particular area to give/receive essential support that would not otherwise be available.
- Temporary accommodation resources.
- Available/accessible Income/savings/assets to resolve own circumstances within the UK private rented sector– with those without this receiving greater priority. Those with income/savings over usual Allocations Policy thresholds will only be considered if there are surplus properties. Those who cannot access savings/assets due to war will not be restricted.

In line with the usual process for assessing Housing Register applications, an assessment of any medical needs will be undertaken where applicable, engaging the housing OT as required, to help determine if a particular property type is required on medical/welfare grounds.

1.3.5 Swapping properties

The council may swap and backfill properties where doing so would assist the council in meeting the immediate needs of the eligible target cohort, fall in line with LAHF objectives outlined in section 1.2 and the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and DLUHC. Any swaps will be agreed by the Head of Housing Supply and Director for Housing, Regeneration and Regulatory Services.

1.3.6 Surplus properties once the immediate needs of target cohort have been met

If/when the immediate needs of **Southend's target eligible cohort** have been met, in the event of there being excess properties, we will work with the Strategic Migration Partnership(SMP) and/or other local authorities to allocate the property/properties to a household within the **wider target eligible cohort**.

The fund aims to create a lasting supply of affordable accommodation for the general population after the immediate needs of the target cohort have been met. Therefore if, after making the SMP aware of property being void, the accommodation has not been matched to, and accepted by a household from the target eligible cohort within a reasonable timeframe, SCC will allocate it to a non ARAP/Ukraine scheme household from the council's housing register. SCC will determine what constitutes a reasonable timeframe and will consider Southend's prevailing housing need at the time, including any risks SCC face in breaching the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003.

1.4 Timescales

The intention is for all homes to be allocated by 31/03/2024. The policy will be reviewed in April 2024.

1.5 Ownership and Authorisation

This policy is owned by the Housing Policy and Operations Service, who sit within the wider housing Regeneration and Housing Directorate. It was agreed at the Housing and Regeneration Departmental Management Team.

1.6 Related policies, procedures, guidelines and protocols

SCC Social housing Allocations Policy available at [Southend.gov.uk](https://southend.gov.uk) with a summary guide available [here](#).

Memorandum of Understanding Between Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Southend-on-Sea City Council: LAHF (Jan 2023)

1.7 Dissemination

In accordance with section 7.19 of the Council's Allocations Policy, this local lettings policy will be published on our website.

2. Implementation

The Council's Resettlement Team are actively working with the target eligible cohort to ensure homeless applications are made, and all required documentation requested, arranging for translation services where required.

All Resettlement applicants who wish to be considered for LAHF properties and are at risk of homelessness have been/will be supported to make a Homeseekers Register applications, including providing details of any medical needs which may impact the type of property they should be considered for. Where applicable, the Housing OT will assist with assessing need for a specific property/adaptations on medical grounds.

The Housing Register Team will assign a bedroom need in line with S6 of SCC's wider Allocations Policy, and band the applicant in accordance with S. 5 of the policy. This is likely to be Band D due to not having a local connection, unless a full homeless duty is accepted, which we treat as a Local connection. Those with a full duty accepted will be placed in band 'One suitable offer' and a direct let of a LAHF property made (if available). Band D applicants will be free to bid for social housing in the normal way, but may be selected by the LAHF panel for a direct let to a LAHF property. The Housing Register Officer will put an 'alert' on the system to highlight the applicant is part of the target eligible cohort for LAHF. A CRM (system) note confirming this will also be added.

Advertising LAHF properties

We will advertise the property on our Choice Based Lettings Website, stating it has been set to 'direct let'. Where it is not being direct let to an applicant owed the main housing duty it will say that it is being direct let in accordance with S9.19 of the Council's Allocation Policy (Local Lettings Policies). This will ensure transparency over allocations whilst preventing applicants outside the target eligible cohort from being able to bid for it. Nominated applicants will have the match to the property recorded on our Housing Management System, Abrisas.

3. Monitoring

The policy will be monitored through housing policy and operations team meetings, which are held bi-weekly, and if/where required, departmental management team meetings.

Regular panel meetings will be held until Southend Resettlement cases in the eligible target cohort have been accommodated and properties are let.

4. Review

The Housing Policy and Operations Service area will review this policy in April 2024.

5. Equality Analysis

An initial Equality Analysis screening is complete, and a fuller Equality analysis is underway and will inform monitoring and review of the policy.

6. Definitions

LAHF: Local Authority Housing Scheme – the government’s scheme for funding properties that are allocated to those being assisted under the Afghan and Ukraine schemes.

Afghan Schemes: This refers to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) schemes, both of which are official resettlement schemes for guests from Afghanistan.

Ukraine schemes: This refers to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, and also guests which are residing in Southend who have arrived under the Family Visa scheme.

LLP: Local Lettings Policy – A policy put in place for allocating social stock outside the usual allocations scheme/policy, as permitted by 166A(6) of the Housing Act 1996 and Section 7.19 of SCC’s Allocations Scheme.

Target Eligible Cohort – Households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are being assisted under the following schemes:

- Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme,
- Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy,
- Ukraine Family Scheme,
- Homes for Ukraine,
- Ukraine extension scheme