



Sub-regional Choice Based Lettings
Scheme Guide and Banding Policy
Consultation



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Your opinion matters

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Greater Haven Gateway (GHG) Sub-regional Choice Based Lettings **Proposed new way of allocating homes in the Greater Haven Gateway**

Introduction

Local authorities are being asked to work together so that you have a greater chance to move to areas other than the one in which you are living.

The new approach will give you a greater choice in selecting where you wish to live and is designed to give you a true understanding of your housing options. Expected to operate from November 2008, Sub-regional Choice Based Lettings will run right across the Greater Haven Gateway sub-region of the East of England (see front cover of this booklet to see the areas Greater Haven Gateway covers). We will use a shared application form, common allocations policy and a shared computer system.

We have produced a draft **Allocations Policy** to use with the Sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme. Consultation is being undertaken with customers and other agencies from December 2007 on the draft allocations policy. The full policy is available on all of the websites of the Partner Organisations (see front cover).

Objectives of the Scheme

These are very clear and are to:

- Meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act (1996) Part VI as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002).
- Provide a single system of choice in housing across the whole sub-region
- Produce a system that customers can understand and which is both open and fair.
- Increase the sustainability of local communities
- Facilitate genuine opportunities for mobility across the sub-region
- Assist customers in the highest assessed need and in minimising homelessness
- Ensure that vulnerable customers are supported in being able to participate
- Provide a complete housing options service to increase the opportunity for all.
- Ensure that the scheme allows Partner Organisations to make best use of homes and in particular adapted properties.

How Choice Based Lettings works

Step 1: Applying for housing

To apply for housing, you must join the housing register by completing the Greater Haven Gateway application form. Applicants do not have to do this yet, we will write and tell you again if you need to complete a new form.

The applications will be assessed for eligibility to join the housing register and you may be required to provide further supporting evidence and documentation.

Step 2: Assessment of Need

You will be placed into one of five housing needs bands (band A – E) based on the information provided.

Band A is the highest housing needs band and band E is the lowest. Within each of these bands there are a number of criteria, which your circumstances will be assessed against.

Where customers have the same housing band the person who has the longest effective date will have the higher priority for housing.

Where any Partner Organisation makes an assessment of need and places you in one of the five housing needs bands, that is your housing needs band for the entire sub-region. Different Partner Organisations will not place customers in different bands, even if they have a local connection to more than one authority.

Step 3: Advertising available homes

Properties will be advertised:

- on the website
- at local offices
- in a property newsletter sent to all Housing Associations, voluntary agencies and other agencies who request it
- Customers in Bands A and B or those who require sheltered accommodation can be sent the property newsletter if they are unable to access the Choice Based lettings system.

Advertisements will include a description of the home and any other relevant information, for example rent charge, property size and any disabled adaptations or other special facilities.

The home will be labelled to show whom it is suitable for and any other qualifying issues e.g. where a local connection is required or if there is an age restriction on the home.

Step 4: Expressing interest in available homes

To be considered for an available home you will need to express an interest (make a bid) on the property you wish to be considered for. This may be done by using the website, telephone, text or calling in person to a local office.

You will be able to make expressions of interest each advertising cycle on properties that meet your need.

You may not be eligible for a property because:

- your bedroom requirement is different to the number of bedrooms in the home
- you do not meet the criteria of a local lettings policy
- there are disabled adaptations that you do not need
- there is an age restriction on the property.

If you require assistance in making bids support will be offered. If you regularly bid on properties that are unsuitable for you, you will be contacted and offered support.

Step 5: Making an offer of accommodation

Once the advertising cycle for the property has closed, a shortlist of customers will be produced for each property.

Generally the successful customer will be the person who has been in the highest housing needs band for the longest period of time.

Step 6: Viewing of a property

Once a shortlist of customers is produced the person with the highest priority who meets the advertised criteria will be invited to view the property. If you view a property but decline it on the grounds that it is unsuitable for you, there will be no penalty against you.

Step 7: Feedback

Feedback will be provided on all homes let through the Choice Based Lettings scheme on a regular basis. This is to provide an open and transparent service and to help you make realistic choices.

Feedback details includes the band of the highest bidding applicant and their effective date and the total number of people who expressed an interest in the home. No personal information will be disclosed. You will be able to receive individual feedback on your bidding for each property through the website or by contacting one of the Partner Organisations (housing associations and councils in the scheme).

Direct Lets

Some properties may not be advertised through the Choice Based Lettings scheme but let directly to a customer who meets specific criteria. The Partner Organisations will advertise that the property has been directly let. The **Allocations Policy** explains when direct lets may be used.

Local connection criteria

Properties may be restricted to those customers who have a local connection to that local authority. This will be made clear on the description of the property advertised.

If you do not have a local connection to the sub-region you may join the scheme but you will be banded one band lower than if you had a local connection to the sub-region.

Reviews and Complaints

You have the right to ask for a review regarding certain decisions made about your application. Details regarding reviews are contained in the **Allocations policy**.

Working with Vulnerable People

To ensure that everyone is able to take part in the scheme, a number of measures will be put in place to protect vulnerable people from being disadvantaged. We will:

- provide appropriate advice and assistance
- translate key documents where necessary
- provide information in other formats where necessary
- develop partnership working with support agencies
- publish a sub-regional vulnerable people strategy
- undertake monitoring and regular reviews of the allocations policies
- hold a list of customers who require additional help with the scheme
- implement a full monitoring system to ensure vulnerable people are using the scheme successfully.

Existing Choice Based Lettings Schemes in the Greater Haven Gateway

Colchester Borough Council has been operating a Choice Based Lettings scheme – Homechoice@Colchester since November 2005. If you wish to find out how choice based lettings works in practice please visit their website – www.homechoiceatcolchester.org.uk. Colchester will be joining the Greater Haven Gateway scheme, which will enable their customers to have the opportunity to move throughout the Greater Haven Gateway.

How does banding work?

The Greater Haven Gateway councils and housing associations use the information you've given in your initial form to award your band (A to E).

The following pages provide details of how the banding system operates and the criteria needed for each band.

Banding Scheme

Band A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High/Severe Medical/Welfare award – to include emergency situations• Releasing a property in need (council or RSL property in the sub-region) or where it prevents the Council making expensive alterations to the property.• Those applicants required to leave their homes as a result of an emergency prohibition order served in relation to the premises under the Housing Act 2004• Tenants Incentive Scheme; where tenant is currently in three or four bed accommodation releasing one or two bedrooms (council or Housing Association property in sub-region).• Two or more assessed Multiple Housing Needs in band B (does not apply to ‘accepted as homeless’ households in severe need)• Accepted Homeless in severe need.• Nominations (move-on) from specified agencies• Qualifying Agricultural workers (see policy for explanation)• Following relationship breakdown where the tenant of a council property in the sub region is under-occupying but has been assessed as having housing need• Successions (council properties in the sub-region where the tenant is under-occupying but has been assessed as having housing need)• Negotiated Surrender – where a council or housing association tenant in sub-region gives up his home to move into prison but has not broken their tenancy conditions – must be agreed with landlord in writing and priority given when released.
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<p>Band B</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium Medical/Welfare award • Tenants Incentive Scheme: for people currently in one or two bedroom accommodation releasing one or two bedrooms (Council or Housing Association property in the sub-region) • Overcrowding in permanent social housing in sub-region • Accepted homeless cases • Applicants threatened with homelessness who are likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress; who are assessed by the particular scheme council as likely to be in priority need and who are receiving housing advice from the particular scheme council to prevent homelessness (this would require a homelessness prevention referral from the particular scheme council's advice and homelessness service.) • A prohibition order or demolition order has been served, or is about to be served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council. This indicates that the property contains one or more category 1 hazards that probably cannot be remedied. • An improvement notice has been, or is about to be, served in relation to the applicant's dwelling by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time ○ The cost of the remedies is beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable) ○ The remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant. • Multiple needs - If someone has four or more needs in band C they will be moved to band B • Applicants assessed as meeting band A criteria but with no local connection to the sub-region.
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<p>Band C</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low medical/welfare award • Notice to quit • Applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness who are assessed by the particular scheme council as not in priority need • Applicants who (following a homelessness application) have been deemed by the particular scheme council to be in priority need but intentionally homelessness • No fixed abode • Being overcrowded in private rented accommodation or social housing outside the sub-region or where the local authority is unable to re-let that property due to its agreement with the landlord • Fixed term licensees (supported housing schemes) • Shared facilities with family or friends • Lacking facilities e.g. no washing facilities, no bathroom, no cooking facilities, no heating. • The Private Sector Housing Team of the council has served a category 1 or 2 hazard awareness notice at the applicant's dwelling and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the remedies that are needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time; or ○ the cost of the remedies are beyond the means of the applicant (where applicable); or ○ the remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant • A suspended improvement notice or prohibition order exists but a foreseeable change in the applicant's circumstances will cause it to become active and result in a high priority situation. • Applicants assessed as meeting band B criteria but with no local connection to the sub-region.
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<p>Band D</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants assessed as meeting band C criteria but with no local connection to the sub-region. • Reduced preference – a PO may give reduced preference to someone who would have been assessed in higher need in the following circumstances : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A customer with significant financial resources - where the customer was financially able to secure alternative accommodation at market rent for himself - Where the behaviour of the applicant (or member of his household) affects his suitability to be a tenant.
<p>Band E</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caravan or mobile home with no housing need • Tied accommodation with no housing need • Applicants who live in a property that is adequate to meet their needs in terms of property type, size and facilities. • Being in prison • A suspended prohibition order or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council in relation to the applicant's dwelling but the criteria leading to it becoming active are not met by the applicant. • A hazard awareness notice or improvement notice has been or will be served by the Private Sector Housing Team of the particular scheme council in relation to the applicant's dwelling but the specified remedies are low cost and straight-forward to achieve. • Owner occupiers (note: owner occupiers will usually only be offered tenancies in sheltered accommodation)

Choice of area

Once you have registered for housing within the Greater Haven Gateway and received your banding you can:

- Find out about council and housing association housing throughout the Greater Haven Gateway region and
- Express an interest in which properties you are interested in.

Things to bear in mind

Most of our properties for letting (including Housing Association properties) will be advertised through the Choice Based Lettings System

There will be some situations where customers are not able to bid on all properties:

- The Greater Haven Gateway will be looking at the number of properties they've let to people coming from other parts of the Greater Haven Gateway. If there's a significant rise, then only people with a local connection to their particular borough or district will be able to bid for homes. This will be clearly stated in the advert.
- Some homes will require you to have a local connection to a particular village. This will be clearly stated in the advert.

If you have:

- **Seen a homelessness officer and the Council has 'accepted a duty' to you under Homelessness law** or
- **Been awarded a band A for a move through nomination agreements (move on)**

You'll be restricted to bidding for properties in the local authority area where you've been accepted as homeless (or where you've received a move on priority).

If you have:

- **Received a medical or welfare award to enable you to move to a specific area (Close to family members)**

You'll only be able to bid for properties in that area you've requested a move to.

Other Information

If you want to find out more about Sub-regional Choice Based Lettings or the allocations policy please contact your Local Authority (see front cover) or contact the Colchester Choice Based Lettings Project Worker:

Clive Currey – clive.currey@colchester.gov.uk

The following local authorities are participating in the scheme:

- **Babergh District Council**
- **Braintree District Council who have transferred their homes to Greenfields Community Housing Association (LSVT)**
- **Colchester Borough Council whose homes are managed by Colchester Borough Homes (ALMO)**
- **Ipswich Borough Council**
- **Maldon District Council who have transferred their homes to Moat Homes Ltd (LSVT)**
- **Mid Suffolk District Council**
- **Suffolk Coastal District Council who have transferred their homes to Suffolk Heritage Housing Association (LSVT)**
- **Tendring District Council**

In addition to these Partner Organisations, other housing associations in the sub-region may use the scheme to advertise their available homes.