

## **KENT COMMON HOUSING ASSESSMENT BRIEFING NOTE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The draft Kent Common Housing Assessment framework has been developed by the Kent Housing Group in conjunction with the 13 local authorities in Kent. The framework sets out to provide a simplified system for assessing the needs of housing applicants that can be adopted across Kent.
- 1.2 In particular the document aims to implement a framework that:
- Creates a simple system that people will understand, will consider to be fair, and will have confidence in
  - Prioritises people who are in the greatest housing need in accordance with statutory obligations
  - Will have regard to local needs and builds in local flexibilities
  - Maximises the use of the social housing stock and improves tenant mobility by providing them with the opportunity of transferring to a more suitable home
- 1.3 The framework document makes it clear that councils are free to shape their own allocation policies according to the needs of the District. Decisions on housing homeless families, transfers and local lettings plans such as those that incentivise working families will all be made at a local level.

### **2. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT**

- 2.1 The Kent Common Housing Assessment framework document proposes to simplify the assessment of housing needs within the District by the introduction of system that places all applications for housing into one of five bands. Within each band, the date of application will determine where each application is placed.
- 2.2 Applications placed in Band A will be regarded as having urgent housing need. Bids from these applicants will be considered first for each vacant home advertised in the Kent Homechoice Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Bands assessed in B, C and D will have less priority, decreasing with each band, with applications in Band E having no priority for a move .
- 2.3 The Council currently assesses housing applications with a points system. The main differences between the current assessment system and the proposed Common Housing Assessment framework are as follows:
- The current points system will be disbanded and applicants will be placed into bands as set out in the table at Appendix A. Applicants are selected for rehousing in date order within that band, with the applicant who has waited the longest being selected first. Once placed in a band, applicants will only be able to move into higher bands in exceptional circumstances.

- The Common Assessment Framework deals with the assessment of housing need only and will be supported by the Council's Allocation Policy which will determine to whom properties in the District are allocated.

Members and residents will be consulted regarding the development of the Council's Allocation Policy which will need to be fully reviewed to work alongside the Common Assessment Framework and to respond to changes arising from the Localism Bill when it is enacted. Members will approve the final document.

The Common Assessment Framework will mean that vacant homes will be advertised through Kent Homechoice with restrictions as to who can bid for them as set out in the Council's Allocations Policy. The Council's Allocation Policy will specify quotas for different types of housing need, for example, those set out in legislation such as homeless households, general applicants on the waiting list, other local priorities as determined by Members and rural exception schemes.

- The Common Assessment Framework will allow the introduction of the Single Agency Assessment, which is a new Kent wide methodology to process applications and referrals for supported accommodation and is not currently used in this District.
- The Council already offers an online application facility for the Sevenoaks District Housing Register but the Common Assessment Framework will enable the online application process to be streamlined and promoted more widely.

2.4.1 The proposed changes to the current scheme for housing needs assessment conforms to legislative requirements and is in response to the statutory guidance "Fair and Flexible" published in 2009 and the proposed Localism Bill currently going through Parliament. The main priorities and explanations of each of the five bands are detailed in the table in Appendix 1.

2.5 The framework document also states who is eligible to join the council's waiting list. Applications must come from persons aged 16 or over, they cannot have a suitable home elsewhere, they cannot be persons from abroad subject to immigration control, and they must not be guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be a tenant.

2.6 The Kent Housing Group proposes that all participating Council's in Kent conduct a joint consultation exercise with registered providers, partners, tenants, residents and other interested parties. This should enable the council to efficiently fulfil its legal duty to involve, as consultation documentation and planning will be pooled amongst all the Kent councils. Any significant changes to the proposals detailed in the Common Housing Assessment framework that came out of the consultation would have to be considered anew by the Cabinet.

2.7 Implementation of Common Housing Assessment has the potential for making efficiency savings to the Council. By working with our partners in Kent Homechoice, a more effective housing needs administration system will be developed. Other choice based lettings schemes, such as the Greater Haven

Gateway in Essex, have seen costs reduce through less reliance on application forms, less need for manual data input and reductions in manual housing assessments.

### 3. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A summary of the perceived risks to the council is shown in the following table:

<b>Perceived risk</b>	<b>Seriousness</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Preventative action</b>
The Common Housing Assessment framework fails to be relevant for the needs of the district	Medium	Low	<p>The council will work with local authority partners to ensure that the new framework is implemented according to best practice and is closely monitored.</p> <p>The document gives priority to broadly similar groups to those currently assessed.</p>

## APPENDIX 1

### Common Assessment Banding Priorities

<b>Band</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Priorities</b>
Band A	Urgent housing need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Urgent medical or welfare needs</li><li>• Management transfer</li></ul>
Band B	Serious housing need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People occupying very overcrowded housing or otherwise living in very unsatisfactory housing conditions.</li></ul>
Band C	Reasonable preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People who are homeless</li><li>• People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions</li><li>• People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability</li><li>• Mobility</li></ul>
Band D	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People who are intentionally homeless, or who have deliberately worsened their housing circumstances</li><li>• People who are accepted as homeless by another local authority</li><li>• Priority but no local connection</li><li>• Non urgent priority but able to afford home purchase</li></ul>
Band E	General without priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No priority and no local connection</li><li>• No priority and able to afford home purchase</li></ul>