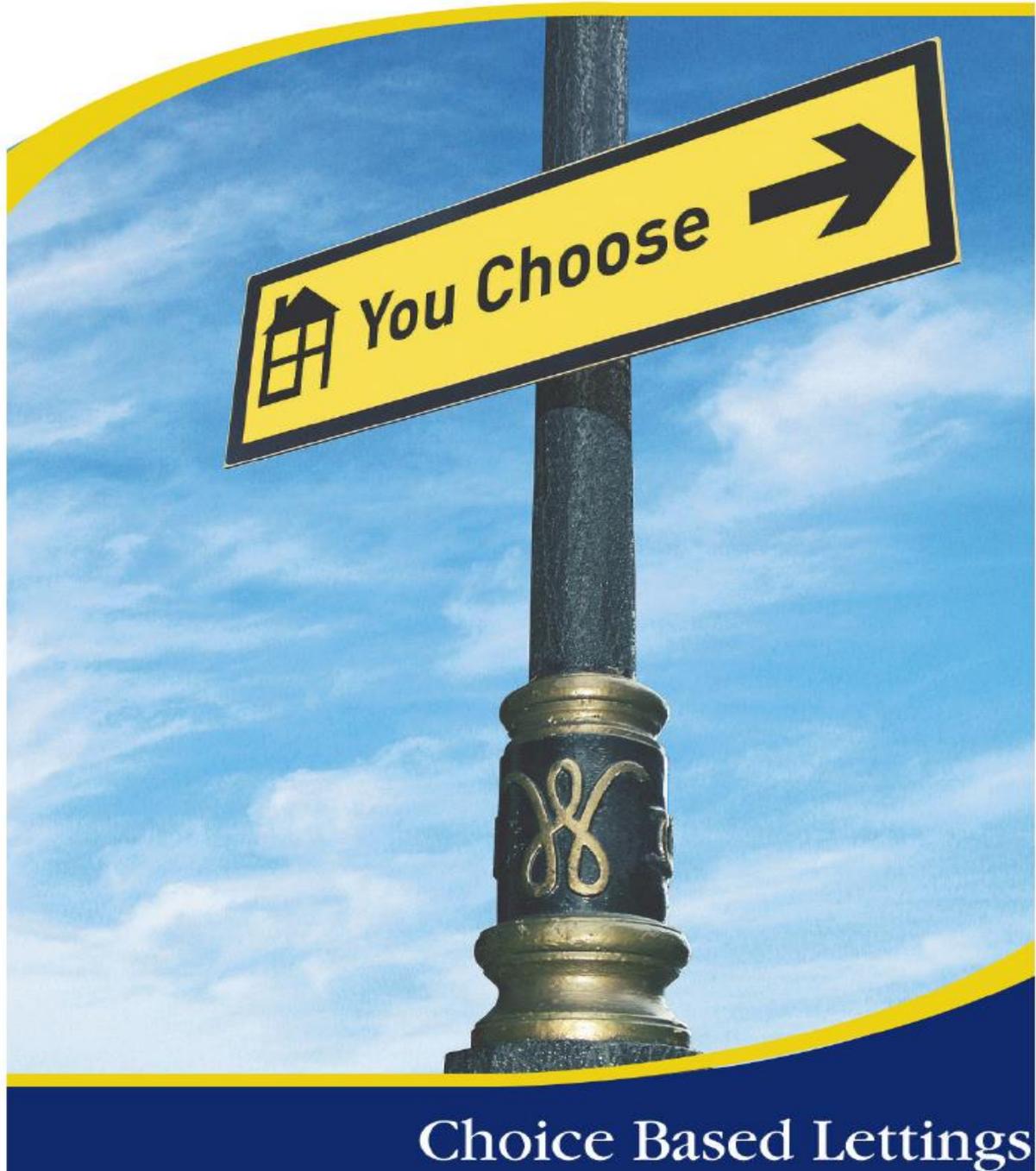




City of Westminster



Choice Based Lettings

# Housing Allocation Scheme Summary February 2024

## Contents

<b>1. Choice Based Lettings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Bidding Process</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Time Limited Bidding</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Arrears</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5. Distribution of Properties between Priority Groups</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6. Priority Groups and Points</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>7. Mobility Criteria</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>8. Medical Priority</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>9. Overcrowding</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>10. Mobility Schemes</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11. Community Supportive Housing for Older People</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>12. Size of Accommodation Offered</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>13. Offers and Refusals of Offers</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>14. Information and Reviews</b>	<b>12</b>

## Summary of Housing Allocation Scheme 2024 (February)

### Introduction

This is a summary of Westminster City Council's Housing Allocation Scheme, re-issued in February 2024. The full Housing Allocation Scheme is published on the Council's website at <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/housing-policy-and-strategy/allocations-scheme>.

Housing policy, including the allocation of housing, is made and amended by the Cabinet Member for Housing.

The Housing Solutions Service, which includes the allocation function, is delivered on behalf of Westminster Council by RMG Ltd in partnership with The Passage Day Centre and Shelter. The service is open at the following times;

**Office:** Monday-Friday 10:00-16:00 (excluding bank holidays and the first and last Wednesday of the month when we do not open until 12 midday)

**Email:** [hsscuserservices@wcchss.org.uk](mailto:hsscuserservices@wcchss.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 0207 641 1000 Monday-Friday 09:00-17:00 (excluding bank holidays and the first and last Wednesday of the month when the office opens at 12 midday)

### 1. Choice Based Lettings (page 12-15 of full scheme)

Since November 2004 the Council has operated a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme for priority applicants. Most Council owned and Registered Provider (Housing Association) properties to which the Council has nomination rights are advertised to eligible applicants on the City Council's housing register. Applicants place bids for the properties they are interested in and the bidder with the highest priority is offered the property.

Westminster Council may in certain circumstances make direct offers to applicants and may discharge our housing duty through making one direct offer of suitable accommodation.

The Council may also in exceptional circumstances decide not to offer a tenancy to the highest bidder where it would not be in the interest of the applicant, another party, or the good management of housing stock.

### 2. Bidding Process (page 28-32 of full scheme)

Eligible applicants will be able to participate in the bidding process if they;

- have been assessed by the Housing Solutions Service and;
- been approved for re-housing following the assessment

- are placed in one of the Priority Groups for re-housing
- are not in arrears of rent/occupation charges
- have not been excluded from bidding for any other reason

Applicants who do not come into a priority group will not be able to participate in CBL.

Properties that are available for letting through Choice Based Lettings will be advertised to eligible bidders on a weekly basis on the Home Connections website. It is the responsibility of each bidder to ensure they check the advertisements each week to see whether bidding is open to their list. Details of access to the website and to making bids are set out in the CBL bidding guide available from the Housing Solutions Service.

The Council will normally shortlist the three highest priority bidders to view each property. At the viewing, the bidders will be asked if they are interested in accepting the property. Subject to certain exceptions (see section 2.2 of the full Allocation Scheme), the bidder with the highest priority and points will be invited to sign the tenancy agreement within a specified period.

If bidders are still equal:

- the bidder with the earliest registration date will be invited to sign the tenancy agreement; or if still equal
- the bidder in the priority group appearing first in the tables on pages six or seven of this summary will be invited to sign

If there is still equality or in the event of a dispute, the Director of Housing Needs has the ultimate discretion to decide whom an offer should be made to.

### **3. Time Limited Bidding** (page 13 of full scheme)

Applicants may be given a specific bidding time in which to bid successfully. If they are not successful within the bidding period, they will be given one direct offer of suitable accommodation. If the applicant refuses the direct offer the Council may discharge their housing duty to them, and they may have to find their own accommodation.

### **4. Arrears** (page 30-32 of full scheme)

Applicants with rent arrears or temporary accommodation charge arrears above certain levels will be unable to participate in Choice Based Lettings. They will continue to be able to view property advertisements but will be unable to bid unless and until the arrears are cleared. Applicants will also be ineligible to be made direct offers of accommodation.

The Director of Housing Needs may exercise discretion in exceptional circumstances to allow applicants with rent or temporary accommodation charge arrears to bid or to receive offers.

#### **5. Distribution of properties between priority groups (page one of full scheme)**

An annual report to the Cabinet Member for Housing reviews the supply and allocation of the Council's housing stock and Registered Provider stock to which the Council has nomination rights. Projections are made to show how the expected supply of housing for the year ahead is intended to be distributed between the priority groups.

The outcome of the bidding is monitored during the year and if some groups are not getting the expected proportion of properties, any imbalance will be addressed by, for example, advertising certain properties exclusively to certain priority groups. Therefore, from time to time some groups will be unable to bid during the year.

#### **6. Priority Groups and Points (page 16-25 of full scheme)**

The scheme sets out priority points for applicants requiring family sized accommodation (page 6) and applicants requiring studio/1-bedroom accommodation (page 7). The purpose of the points is to give reasonable preference to certain groups as required by law and to assist other groups of applicants. Applications consisting of a household with a child/children will have 10 more points than an all-adult household to reflect the needs of children.

The main priority groups are shown below (for descriptions of the individual lists within these priority groups please refer to the relevant sections in the full Allocation Scheme);

- Renewal Tenants
- Under-occupiers (Cash Incentive Scheme - Westminster Council tenants only)
- Pressing Housing Need (such as Management Transfers)
- Medical
- Overcrowding
- Homeless
- Older People (aged 60+ eligible for Community Supportive Housing)

**Table 1 - Points for Family Sized Accommodation**

				Additional Points					Points Deducted
Priority Group		Priority List	Priority Points	Workers	Residence	Stage 2 Lease End	Armed Forces	Local Connection Criteria On Renewal Estates	All Adult Household
<b>Renewal Tenants*</b>		Returning Tenants	605	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Renewal Tenants (Permanent) with high local connection	600	-	-	-	-	4	-
		Renewal Tenants (Temporary) with high local connection	600	-	-	-	-	3	-
		Renewal Tenants (Permanent) with medium local connection	600	-	-	-	-	2	-
		Renewal Tenants (Temporary) with medium local connection	600	-	-	-	-	1	-
<b>Under-occupation</b> (including flexible tenancies)	Transfer List	Cash Incentive and under-occupying flexible tenants	550	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Pressing Housing Need</b>	Transfer List	Management Transfer, Decants/Major Works, Community Care Nominations and Children Act Panel	450	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Waiting List	Succession/Assignment, RP Decants, Discretionary Lessee Renewal Tenants, Reciprocal, Community Care Nominations and Children Act Panel	400	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Learning Disabilities	400	-	-	-	10	-	-
<b>Medical</b> (people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including grounds relating to disability)	Transfer List	Category A Medical	250	50	50	-	-	-	-
	Waiting List	Category A Medical	200	50	50	-	10	-	-
<b>Overcrowding</b> (People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions)	Waiting List	Registered Provider Quota	300	-	-	-	-	-	-
		HHSRS band A Hazard or Part X Housing Act 1985	250	50	50	-	10	-	-10
	Transfer List	HHSRS band A Hazard or Part X Housing Act 1985	300	50	50	-	-	-	-10
		Lacking 3 bedrooms	300	50	50	-	-	-	-10
		Lacking 2 bedrooms	200	50	50	-	-	-	-10
Lacking 1 bedroom	100	50	50	-	-	-	-	-10	
<b>Homeless</b> (Main Housing Duty)			150	50	50	200	10	-	-
<b>Homeless</b> (Others)			20	50	50	-	10	-	-

*\*includes tenants of Huguenot House, see Cabinet Member Report January 2022*

**Table 2 - Points for Studio and 1-Bedroom Accommodation**

			Additional Points				
	Priority List	Priority Points	Stage 2 Lease End	Subject to LHA Cap	Armed Forces	Local Connection Criteria on Renewal Estates	High Priority Medical/Welfare Points
<b>General Needs</b>	Returning Tenants	605	-	-	-	-	-
	Renewal Tenants (Permanent) with high local connection	600	-	-	-	4	-
	Renewal Tenants (Temporary) with high local connection	600	-	-	-	3	-
	Renewal Tenants (Permanent) with medium local connection	600	-	-	-	2	-
	Renewal Tenants (Temporary) with medium local connection	600	-	-	-	1	-
	Under-occupying Flexible Tenants and Cash Incentives	550	-	-	-	-	-
	Decants/Major Works, Management Transfers	450	-	-	-	-	-
	Social Services Nominations (Tenants) including Community Care Nominations, Children Act Panel and Children Leaving Care	450	-	-	-	-	-
	Social Services Nominations (Waiting List) including Community Care Nominations, Children Act Panel and Children Leaving Care	400	-	-	-	-	-
	Learning Disabilities Quota	400	-	-	10	-	-
	RP Decant and Discretionary Lessee Renewal Tenants	400	-	-	-	-	-
	Reciprocals	400	-	-	-	-	-
	Succession/Assignment	400	-	-	-	-	-
	Medical (Transfers)	250	-	-	-	-	-
	Medical (Waiting List)	200	-	-	10	-	-
	Homeless (Main Housing Duty)	150	200	-	10	-	-
	Pathway Housings	150	-	-	10	-	-
	Tenants (Studio to 1-bed)	100	-	-	-	-	-
	Mental Health Hostel Move-On Quota	150	-	-	10	-	-
Hostel Move-On/Street Homeless/Drug Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)	150	-	-	10	-	-	
Homeless Other	20	-	-	10	-	-	
<b>Community Supportive Housing</b>	Cash Incentive	550	-	-	-	-	50
	Decants (Tenants)	450	-	-	-	-	50
	RP Decants and Discretionary Lessee Renewal Tenants	400	-	-	-	-	50
	Succession/Assignment	400	-	-	-	-	50
	Council Tenants	200	-	-	-	-	50
	Homeless (Main Housing Duty)	150	200	-	10	-	50
	Hostel Move-On	150	-	-	10	-	50
	Pathway Housings	150	-	-	10	-	50
	Waiting List Applicants	50	-	50	10	-	50
	Incoming Nominations	50	-	-	-	-	50
	Homeless (Other)	20	-	-	10	-	50

## 7. Mobility Criteria (page 26-27 of full scheme)

All applicants eligible to participate in Choice Based Lettings will be assessed to see what type of property matches their mobility and access requirements. All applicants and all properties will be given a Mobility Category.

### Mobility Category Applicants (see S&A report 11<sup>th</sup> August 2015)

Category 1	Applicants who have been assessed by a NHS doctor as having a diagnosis which requires them permanently to use a wheelchair all the time
Category 2	Applicants who have been assessed by a NHS doctor as having a diagnosis which requires them permanently to need a home which is wheelchair accessible but may not need to use it inside the home
Category 3	Applicants with severe mobility problems who require a ground floor or lifted property with level access and no internal stairs
Category 4	All other applicants

### Property Mobility Category

Category 1	Property is fully wheelchair accessible
Category 2	Property is suitable for a person who needs a wheelchair outside the home but can manage in the home without a wheelchair.
Category 3	Property with no more than 3 steps to access property and no internal stairs. May be lifted.
Category 4	All other properties

Every application and property is given a 'mobility category' to ensure properties are offered to the most suitable household. For example if a property is suitable for a mobility category 3 applicant, applicants with mobility category 3 will be given priority over an applicant with mobility category 4 even if the applicant with mobility category 4 has more points.

Properties suitable for wheelchair users (mobility category 1 or 2) will not be advertised through CBL. Applicants requiring mobility category 1 or 2 properties will be given a direct offer. This is due to the limited supply and the relatively small number of people registered for this type of property.

When persons within the same mobility category bid for an advertised mobility category property, priority will depend upon who has the most points and, if equal, the household that has waited the longest.

## 8. Category A Medical Priority (page 59-62 of full scheme)

Re-housing on medical, welfare and disability grounds normally arises when the housing situation **seriously** adversely affects health, and the property cannot reasonably be adapted to meet needs and thereby causes the need to move. All cases are considered on individual severity and merit.

A medical adviser will provide an assessment for applicants applying on medical grounds to determine whether the criteria for this Priority Group is met. As part of the assessment consideration will be given to the suitability of the current property and any adaptations that have been carried out. If the housing need is met by the adaptations, or could be met by further alterations, medical priority may not be awarded.

Westminster Council tenants, Registered Provider tenants and households living in private sector rented accommodation can apply for priority on medical grounds. Accepted homeless applicants are placed in temporary accommodation that is suitable for their needs and those with medical grounds for a move will be assessed to determine the mobility category that applies to the household.

Applicants in private rented accommodation will be assisted to find alternative private sector accommodation in order to relieve or alleviate the existing need. Where it is not possible to find a private sector home to meet the households needs, they may be placed on the Category A Medical Priority list.

## **9. Overcrowding** (page 63-65 of full scheme)

**Westminster Council Tenants** - are given points to reflect the level of overcrowding in their household. They are given points for each additional bedroom they require.

Severely overcrowded households who are assessed as a Band A hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), or assessed as being statutorily overcrowded, will qualify for the highest number of overcrowding points. See appendix V of the full scheme for the definition of statutory overcrowding.

Only people included on the application will be taken into account when assessing if a household meets the HHSRS or statutory overcrowding criteria. Section 3 of the full scheme sets out who can be included on a transfer application.

Additional priority will be given to households with children (under 18 yrs old) by deducting ten points from all adult households.

**Registered Provider (Housing Association) Tenants** - who live in Westminster, can be nominated to Westminster Council for a move to a larger home if they are overcrowded. The Registered Provider will decide which households to nominate but this will usually be households who are severely overcrowded and have been assessed either as a Band A hazard under HHSRS or are statutorily overcrowded. See section 7.5 of the full Allocation Scheme for details of the Registered Provider Quota.

**Private Sector Tenants** – who live in private rented accommodation and who are statutorily overcrowded will not be eligible to join this Priority Group but will be assisted to find alternative private sector accommodation of the correct size in order to relieve or alleviate the existing housing need. Where it is not possible to find a private sector home to meet the households needs they may be placed on the Overcrowded Priority List.

**Homeless** - Overcrowded households living in temporary accommodation will be registered for a transfer to a larger temporary home. An offer will be made when a suitable property becomes available.

#### **10. Mobility Schemes** (page 88 of full scheme)

There are national mobility schemes such as Homeswapper that may be available to social housing tenants who do not come within the Priority Groups. Applicants can register directly and, in some cases, Registered Providers pay the registration fee on behalf of their tenants. Westminster Council tenants can register for free.

#### **11. Community Supportive Housing for Older People** (page 73 of full scheme)

In 2010 the Council reclassified its sheltered and supported accommodation as Community Supportive Housing (CSH). To be eligible for Community Supportive Housing single applicants or couples must be aged 60 years old or over. Cases are assessed on an individual basis and where a frail applicant under 60 years old is applying the minimum age of 55 years old will be considered.

A Joint Assessment Panel for Older Persons (JAPOP) considers all requests for re-housing from older people. JAPOP is made up of officers from the Housing Solutions Service, Social & Community Services and Scheme Managers. The panel determines the support needs of applicants applying for Community Supportive Housing.

#### **12. Size of Accommodation Offered** (page 77-78 of full scheme)

Applicants will be able to bid for properties that have one bedroom less than they are entitled to, provided this does not result in statutory overcrowding.

Households may bid for properties up to two bedrooms smaller than they are entitled to, provided this does not result in the property being statutorily overcrowded.

If the property belongs to a Registered Provider (RP) the household must meet the requirements of the RP's bedroom standard.

A case management approach will be taken for households who require a 3-bedroom property or larger. Household members may be offered separate housing in smaller properties and will receive one direct offer. Applicants will not be able to bid for properties larger than they need, subject to discretion in exceptional cases.

The Council's bedroom standard is set out below.

A single person is entitled to a studio ie one bedsitting room, kitchen, bathroom/WC. Single WCC tenants living in a 1-bedroom general needs property and assessed as needing Community Supportive Housing will be registered for a 1-bedroom CSH if requested (*S&A report 11<sup>th</sup> August 2015*).

Couples are entitled to one bedroom and a living room, kitchen, bathroom/WC. However, couples living in a studio will not be considered to be overcrowded.

Two adult siblings of the same sex are entitled to one bedroom and separate living room, kitchen, bathroom/WC and it is expected they will use the bedroom and living room as two bed-sitting rooms.

Larger households are entitled to a living room, kitchen, bathroom/WC and each of the following will be allocated one bedroom;

<b>Adults</b>	An applicant or an applicant and partner
	Two siblings of the same sex where the age gap is ten years or less
	An adult who is not the partner or same-sex sibling of the applicant (although such household members may instead, at the discretion of the Council, be offered separate re-housing in a studio or in Community Supportive Housing)
	An adult who is accepted by the Council to be the carer for a person assessed as needing overnight and/or 24-hour care seven days a week and not the partner or same-sex sibling of the applicant
<b>Children</b>	Two children of the opposite sex under ten
	Two children of the same sex under the age of 16, or two children of the same sex where one or both is over the age of 16 and where the age gap is ten years or less
	One child (not coming into the above categories)

### 13. Offers and Refusals of Offers (page 79-80 of full scheme)

Subject to the restrictions set out below or otherwise contained in the full scheme, there is no limit to the number of properties that an applicant may bid for under Choice Based Lettings.

If an applicant is shortlisted for more than three properties in the same week, they will only be allowed to view three and will be asked to choose which three they wish to view. They must respond promptly when asked or otherwise the Council may exercise its discretion and decide that they have lost the right to view one or more of those properties or decide on their behalf which ones they should view.

Applicants may refuse the property at the viewing stage and continue to be able to bid for other properties. However, if an applicant signs a tenancy but refuses or fails to move in, they will be unable to bid for properties for up to six months.

Applicants who refuse the maximum number of direct offers to which they are entitled may have their housing application closed.

Refusal of an offer by a homeless person owed a duty under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 can lead to a cessation of that duty. The statutory provisions will apply.

Applicants requiring mobility category 1 or 2 properties (suitable for wheelchair users) will receive one direct offer only.

In cases where the needs of the household as assessed by the Council's occupational therapist are so specific due for example to the adaptations required, the size or the location, that suitable properties will be rare or will need to be specially adapted, the Council will make a direct offer of suitable housing and should this be refused, the applicant's priority for re-housing will end.

#### **14. Information and Reviews** (page 81 of full scheme)

Applicants have the right to request internal reviews of certain decisions relating to homelessness and the housing register. These will be carried out by the Housing Solutions Service.

The Service will also provide on request information to applicants as to;

- Which, if any, priority group they are in
- Their points and position in that group
- The estimated number of properties of the size required by the applicant expected to become available for letting during that financial year.

**Please note this is a summary of the Housing Allocation Scheme published in February 2024 and cannot cover all situations and exceptions.**