1.0 Refining the Current Scheme – Who Has Priority?

1.1 Many local authorities have recently tightened up priority criteria for the housing register, to take into account the increasing gap between supply and demand:

- Boroughs including Redbridge, Hackney, Lambeth, Ealing, Harrow, and Manchester expect people of the same sex to share rooms up to the age of 21, while Waltham Forest allows for separate rooms from the age of 16, meaning that a family in a 2 bedroom home with 2 daughters aged 14 and 16 would be classified as overcrowded.
- Boroughs including Haringey, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Greenwich do not give preference to people who live in non-self-contained accommodation, unless a serious hazard has been identified. In WF we give priority to anyone living in non-self-contained accommodation.
- Hackney and Islington require 3 year residency to be eligible for the Housing Register; Ealing, Harrow, and Hounslow require 5 years. WF’s current requirement is 2 years.

1.2 The current priority scheme means that we devote significant resources to administering applications which will never result in an allocation. A reduction in numbers will enable us to give a better and more focussed service to those with higher levels of need.

1.3 At the same time as tightening up some criteria, many local authorities are rewarding applicants who are improving their own circumstances e.g. those in employment, training, education or voluntary work.

1.4 The CCA would give priority by moving the application into the higher band, thus giving the applicant greater priority for housing than s/he would receive with the same housing need but without the CCA. This is shown in more detail in section 2 of this report.

1.5 Ascham Homes would work jointly with other services to promote employment, education, training and volunteering opportunities in order to maximise the potential for this option.¹

1.6 Identification of employment status will enable us to target affordable housing at employed people where required due to grant funding conditions, and/or where desired in order to achieve mixed and sustainable communities.

1.7 Our current allocations scheme allows us to have local lettings policies for specific developments, which would be the most flexible way to facilitate targeted lettings.

¹ Suggested criteria:
- Working 16 or more hours weekly, (for the last 12 months) with no more than a 3 month gap (excluding maternity leave)
- Volunteering for continuous period of at least 6 months, for verified not-for profit organisation/charity, for at least 10 hours per month
- Registered foster carer for Waltham Forest children
- Participating in recognised education/training programme leading to formal professional qualification and/or guaranteed employment
- Applicant/partner left the armed forces in the last 2 years
Allocations would be dealt with by restrictive labelling of voids advertised, so that only those meeting specific criteria (e.g. employed) would be able to bid.

1.8 The award of CCA will also enable those who are not in housing need but who are working to bid for properties as they will be moved to a higher band (currently those on the Register with no housing need are unable to bid).

1.9 Our current scheme allows us to allocate a small quota of 1 bed “hard to let” properties to economically active single people/couples using fixed term tenancies with higher than social rent levels. The idea was that tenants would be able to save in order to buy/rent privately at the end of the tenancy. This has never been implemented due to the high demand for such properties for vulnerable people.

1.10 If we adopt the CCA option to recognise employment as a basis for prioritisation across the whole allocations scheme, we would remove the above “hard to let” policy as economically active people will be catered for more broadly. The use of fixed term tenancies will be addressed separately in a review of our Tenancy Strategy.

1.11 We are therefore proposing the following amendments to our scheme:

- Increasing the room sharing limit from 16 to 21
- Removing priority for sharing facilities
- Amending the residency requirement from 2 years to 4 years
- Prioritising applicants by giving a community contribution award (CCA) to applicants who are working, volunteering, or contributing in other ways. The CCA would give priority by moving the application into the higher band. (see para 5.2 below)

2.0 Refining the Current Scheme – Simplifying the Assessment Process

The current scheme is complicated, based on priority groups with the addition of different points levels and cumulative preference within those groups. As there is no longer a requirement for allocations schemes to reflect cumulative preference, we would like to simplify this scheme. Currently the groups are Additional Preference Plus, Additional Preference, Reasonable Preference and No Preference.

2.1 We propose the use of 5 bands:

- **Band 1 – Maximum Priority** - emergencies, urgent decants, under-occupiers, tenants giving up adapted accommodation
- **Band 2 – High Priority Plus** - housing need as for Band 3 + CCA
- **Band 3 – High Priority** - severe medical/social need/overcrowding (lacking 3+ bedrooms) unacceptable housing conditions, non-urgent decant, awaiting discharge (e.g. from hospital), vulnerable quotas (e.g. move-on, mappa etc), significant sheltered need, retiring caretaker, homeless in TA where landlord is withdrawing property, Band 4 +CCA
- **Band 4 – Low Priority** - homeless/threatened with homelessness, moderate medical/social/sheltered need, overcrowded (lacking up to 2 bedrooms), need to move
to particular locality within this authority, people with historical reasonable preference points for accepting Rent Deposit properties

- **Band 5 - Band 6 + CCA**
- **Band 6 – No Priority** - no housing need, sufficient resources to secure own accommodation.

3.0 **Transfer-led lettings**

3.1 To control the number of homeless households living in Temporary Accommodation (TA), in recent years around 50% of properties have been allocated to people in TA as direct lets. In 2013/14, 423 out of 766 allocations went to homeless households. This conflicts with the policy decision to remove additional preference status from this group to deter “queue-jumping” by taking the homelessness route into social housing.

3.2 Homelessness acceptances and numbers in TA are on the increase, and although we now have the options of offering private sector accommodation, there are some families impacted by the benefit cap in TA for whom no affordable private rented accommodation can be found within current location guidelines. There is also increased competition for the accommodation that is available.

3.3 At the same time, there is a need to address the needs of people living in both the private sector and the social sector whose accommodation is unsuitable because of severe overcrowding, medical needs etc.

3.4 **We are proposing the use of a more transfer-led approach, targeting more properties at transfer applicants to facilitate chain lettings.**

3.4.1 The example below illustrates how one initial vacancy can solve the needs of 5 households:

- **3 bed house vacancy**
- Advertised to council tenants only
- 3 bed house allocated to an overcrowded tenant in a 1 bed flat
- Subsequent 1 bed flat goes to an under-occupier in a 3 bed house
- Subsequent 3 bed house goes to an overcrowded household in a 2 bed house
- Subsequent 2 bed house goes to a medical case in a 2 bed flat
- 2 bed flat remains after a series of chain transfer lettings

Policy decision:
Allocate 2 bed flat via Register or as a direct let to homeless

Housing Register via Choice Homes
4.0 London Housing Strategy – Affordable Housing Delivery Framework

4.1 Housing providers bidding for funding through the Mayor’s 2015-18 affordable housing programme will have to comply with certain conditions, including a requirement that new affordable rented homes must be equally split between Discounted Rent (where tenants will have to pay up to 80% of market rent) and Capped Rent (around 50% of market rent). The Discounted Rent properties will be targeted at employed people, and the Capped Rent properties will be targeted at “those in greatest need” and those in low paid employment.

4.2 The introduction of the Community Contribution Award (CCA) and the identification of employment status will enable us to target affordable housing at employed people where required due to grant funding conditions, and/or where desired in order to achieve mixed and sustainable communities.

4.3 Our allocations scheme already allows us to have local lettings policies for specific developments, which would be the most flexible way to facilitate targeted lettings. Allocations would be dealt with by restrictive labelling of voids advertised, so that only those meeting specific criteria (e.g. employed) would be able to bid.

4.4 The award of CCA will also enable those who are not in housing need but who are working to bid for properties as they will be moved to a higher band (currently those on the Register with no housing need are unable to bid). This will allay fears expressed by some housing providers that we will be unable to nominate applicants to more expensive properties.