

**REPORT TO THE HOUSING MINISTER**

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING GATEWAY –  
PHASE 1 IMPLEMENTATION**

**Background**

Priority 14 of the States Strategic Plan charges the Housing Department with establishing a “gateway” for affordable housing to ensure that existing and future stock is targeted to deliver maximum benefit.

Assessing the level of need for new social rented homes, and indeed all types of housing need, is difficult due to the fact that there are a number of different agencies providing housing who all operate their own waiting lists, with applicants being assessed using differing sets of criteria. The lists are generally uncoordinated and the system does not lend itself to ensuring that the stock is used to best effect.

A fundamental review of Social Housing was commissioned to investigate the existing approach to the provision of Social Rented Housing and to make recommendations for changes. The review was undertaken by Professor Christine Whitehead OBE of the London School of Economics and Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge. In her report published in 2009, Professor Whitehead made a number of observations and she demonstrated that change was necessary in a number of areas. In relation to access to social housing, the Professor made the following comments:-

1. Social housing needs to be more accessible if the housing needs of those in long term housing need are to be met.
2. There needs to be clearer and more equitable allocations criteria across all providers.

The Affordable Housing Gateway (AHG) is currently being developed as part of the Housing Transformation Programme, which itself is working to address all of the challenges set by Professor Whitehead in her review. The AHG will, in time, be the single point of access for all affordable housing, both to rent and purchase. It will operate with widened access criteria and all allocations to social rented accommodation will be to those assessed through the Gateway. The Gateway will deliver the following benefits over time:-

- A comprehensive up to date measure of demand for affordable housing
- Of that, how many require social housing and the relative degrees of need
- Informing policy in the provision of new affordable housing products
- Better equity and transparency in respect of access to social housing
- Improved clarity regarding potential waiting times
- A single waiting list which avoids duplication and double counting
- Reduced administrative burden on all the providers
- Eliminating the need for the existing nomination agreements
- Possibility of engaging private landlords in utilising the pool for new tenants



There are a number of other work streams in progress which will have some impact on the AHG and its ability to deliver all of the benefits set out above. It is likely that the fully operational Gateway will not be in place within the next 18 months. There is however sufficient good reason, desirability and indeed support for the AHG to be implemented in phases, with Phase 1 being implemented in January 2012.

Phase 1 will aim to deliver the following key benefits:

- A single waiting list for both new applicants and existing tenants needing to transfer, including all of all those currently on a waiting list held by any other social housing provider
- All applicants assessed on common criteria designed to confirm their degree of housing need
- All applicants assigned a need band (appendix 1)
- All social housing allocations are then to the applicant in the highest band who best matches the property criteria set by the landlord (e.g. Properties operated by the Parishes can be prioritised to those living in the Parish)
- Landlords fill all social housing vacancies, including transfers, from the Gateway (this eliminates the need for the existing nomination arrangements)

It is not planned at this stage to widen the access criteria entirely, as that would raise unmanageable expectations. The criteria will be widened over time in line with the development of Regulation and, importantly, the delivery of new stock. This process will also be informed by the 2011 Census and 2012 Housing Needs Survey.

Once the Phase 1 list has been established, the allocation of all social rented vacancies will be carried out through a nomination process from the AHG – whether that is to fill available properties within the Housing Department or Housing Trusts. That process is being developed in full collaboration with representatives from the Jersey Homes Trust, Les Vaux Housing Trust, Christians Together in Jersey Housing Trust, FB Cottages Housing Trust and Clos du Paradis Housing Trust. This group will develop the processes which allow the Gateway to operate and interface with providers. The group will also have an important role in monitoring the performance of the Gateway post implementation. Gateway development is focusing on the Housing Department and these Housing Trusts who hold the vast majority of the stock. However, the role played by the Parishes in providing social housing is important and it is hoped that they will also wish to participate once the Gateway is established. It is open for them to become involved at any time.

In order to progress with Phase 1 of the AHG implementation, it will be necessary to deviate from the Ministers Allocations Policy HD7 (last reviewed and approved in November 2010 under reference MD-H-2010-0098), for all those existing applicants already accepted onto other social housing waiting lists and who may not necessarily meet the Policy requirements, and assess those through the new AHG bands. It will also be necessary to assess and accept all current and future Transfer applicants onto the Gateway list.

For the time being, and until such time as further consideration has been given to the impact of widening the criteria completely, all new waiting list applicants will continue to be assessed against the key criteria of HD7, and then placed in the appropriate AHG bands. New Applicants will still therefore need to fall into one of the following groups in order to be accepted onto the AHG at this time:-

1. People with medical, physical or mental disabilities, who need special types of housing, but who cannot afford such accommodation in the private sector.
2. Families with young children, on relatively low incomes. (We consider situations involving separation or divorce on a case-by-case basis, but we cannot provide children with more than one home.)
3. People aged 50 or over, on relatively low incomes.

This is necessary in order to allow the Trusts to effectively close their lists and fill their vacant properties from the Gateway, with the assurance that their existing waiting list applicants and tenants needing to transfer will still be considered for social housing. Indeed those applicants will have improved opportunities as they will have access to vacant properties from all of the providers and not just the *individual Trust* they are registered or already housed with. Completion of this process will test the banding system and offer a significantly better, albeit not full, picture of increased housing demand whilst also eradicating duplication and simplifying access for applicants.

### Recommendation

That the Minister approves the implementation of Phase 1 of the Affordable Housing Gateway and recommendations to:-

- 1) Re-assess all existing States rental waiting and transfer list applications through the Affordable Housing Gateway Banding system;
- 2) Assess all existing applicants registered with other social housing providers, and current tenants needing to transfer, through the Affordable Housing Gateway Banding system;
- 3) Continue to assess all new waiting list applicants against the criteria set out in the Ministers Allocations Policy HD7 but prioritised in line with the Affordable Housing Gateway Bands.

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Appendix 1 – Proposed “banding” for the Affordable Housing Gateway

BAND	CHARACTERISTICS OF APPLICANTS
1	<p>Actually Homeless</p> <p>Under Eviction Notice (Court Order in Place)</p> <p>In Tied Accommodation<sup>1</sup> where employment has ceased</p> <p>Unable to occupy or return to present home because of Urgent Medical Issue</p> <p>Existing tenant needing to Transfer for decant reason</p> <p>Existing tenant under occupying</p> <p>Have no rights to stay in current accommodation such as staying with friends or family</p> <p>Forced to live apart from forced to live apart from family because present accommodation isn't suitable</p> <p>Any combination of the circumstances in band 2</p>
2	<p>Grave overcrowding (opposite gender children sharing a room or more than 2 children in one room)</p> <p>Poor housing standards</p> <p>Moderate Medical Cases (by Medical Officer of Health determination)</p> <p>Other Transfers</p>
3	<p>Only able to rent appropriate accommodation in Private Rented Sector with financial assistance</p>
4	<p>Able to rent appropriate accommodation in the Private Rented Sector without financial assistance</p>
5	<p>Presently Adequately Housed</p> <p>Little or no housing need but simply wish to change home</p> <p>Able to purchase but only with financial subsidy or assistance</p> <p>All those in receipt of a Jersey Homebuy qualifying certificate</p>
6	<p>Multi-Agency Supported Housing – Applicants who will require ongoing landlord support to live independently and are only likely to be housed by certain landlords who can offer that ‘extra care’.</p>