

SELECTION CRITERIA

Property Type

For the first year it is suggested that the project focuses on conversions or extensions to houses. Generally works of this nature will be more challenging and potentially not viable in flats. Initially houses should be looked at to make best use of accommodation whilst recognising the changing demographics and high demand for smaller units of accommodation for single person households and for those down sizing.

Concentrating initially on houses will enable officers to fully test the process and if viable flats could be included in the consideration process in years 2 and 3.

Prioritisation of Households to Benefit from the Scheme

Officers will need to ensure the provision of a loft conversion or an extension is applied in a transparent, fair and consistent way. It is also important to demonstrate that value for money has been achieved and that the capital expenditure will make a real improvement to the recipient household for many years to come.

Household Selection

The selection of households will be based on the council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Council tenants who wish to transfer to another property may join the scheme and will be placed in one of four broad bands of housing need depending on their circumstances. It is from this list that households will be selected.

The banding structure is contained within the council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme guidance. Households in band A have the highest priority for alternative accommodation and those in band D have the lowest priority. A number of different factors are taken into account when deciding which band a household is placed in including overcrowding:

- Applicants will be placed in band A where the property is deemed to be statutorily overcrowded by an Environmental Health Officer under Section X of the Housing Act 1985 and there are no means to make the property fit.
- Applicants will be placed in Band B if they lack two or more bedrooms and Band C if they lack one bedroom below the following provisions:

An independent adult (18 years +)	1 bedroom, including a bedsit or studio flat
Co-habiting couples	1 bedroom
A dependent child	1 bedroom
Two children of opposite gender where one is aged over 5 years	2 bedrooms
Two children of the same gender, any age	1 bedroom

Within each band priority is awarded to the household who has been registered the longest.

Please note that if there is a second reception room it will generally be deemed to be available for use as a bedroom. Box rooms, which can reasonable be used by a child, will count as a single bedroom.

Therefore when determining priority for a conversion or extension the first consideration will be council tenants who have applied for a transfer and who are overcrowded. The first priority will be those who are in band A for overcrowding reasons, then band B and then band C. Within each band the priority will be given to the household who has been registered the longest. As such the determination mirrors the council's agreed Allocations Policy and Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

Where the number of eligible applicants in Band B exceed the number of extensions that can be completed with the funding available in any one year priority will be given to those lacking the greatest number of bedrooms and then in order of the date of application.

Prioritisation for Working Households / Those Making a Positive Contribution

With the funding available it is estimated that 10 properties year could benefit from a loft conversion or extension. The current Allocations Policy sets out that 50% of all properties containing 2 or more bedrooms are allocated to working households. An income cap of £35,000 per annum also applies.

This policy is currently being considered and it is proposed to also include households who are making a positive contribution. The proposed Allocations Policy clearly defines working households, those who are making a positive contribution, income capping, exclusions and evidence required. This policy will be agreed at the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting on 22 March 2011.

In tandem with the Allocations Policy, subject to Housing CMM on 22 March 2011, 50% of properties selected will be tenanted by working households or those making a positive contribution. The selection process will mirror the agreed Allocations Policy in this respect and use the same definitions, evidence collection and other criteria as outlined above.

Initially households who meet the definition and are in band A due to overcrowding will be considered. Thereafter households will be selected in order from band B and band C.

As of 15 February 2011 analysis of overcrowded transfer applicants living in houses showed:

Band	No. on list	No. Working	No. Not Working	No. in Arrears
A	11	4	7	2
B	37	11	26	12
C	85	50	35	26

No information regarding making a positive contribution has been collated and would need to be gathered from applicants.

Tenants with Rent Arrears or Other Housing Related Debts

If the tenant has rent arrears or other housing related debts the case will be referred to the existing Arrears Transfer Panel. This is a panel of officers who consider cases where transfer applicants are by-passed for a move because of housing related debts. This will ensure a consistency in the decision making process and ensure comprehensive advice is given to the household to help reduce their debt or to get them into a repayment plan. Such a process can act as a very strong lever to tackle and resolve arrears issues.

Tenants with Other Breaches of Their Tenancy Agreement

The council's allocation policy states that the council will not normally make an offer of accommodation to a transfer applicant where the tenant is guilty of a breach of tenancy resulting in:

“Housing Act Injunction, Anti-Social Behaviour Order, Notice of Seeking Possession, Suspended Possession Order or demoted tenancy (if adopted) granted as a result of the breach of other aspects of the tenancy agreement.”

It is intended that this scheme will adopt the same stance and exclude such tenants from benefitting from a loft conversion or extension.

Lead Commissioner for Housing Discretion for other exceptional circumstances not covered by this scheme

From time to time a situation may arise that is not adequately reflected in these selection criteria in terms of the priority they have been awarded but the

needs or circumstances are exceptional and significant. Where a case is considered exceptional but the applicant would not qualify for a loft conversion or extension then the Lead Commissioner for Housing in Brighton & Hove City Council reserves the right to override the criteria and allow an applicant to have a higher priority than they would be entitled to. These cases will be few in number and will be closely monitored.

All of the above cases will be taken to Housing Management Consultative Committee on a yearly basis to review the numbers submitted, the outcome of the cases and brief reason for the case being submitted via this route

Assessing the Suitability of a Property for Conversion or Extension

Initially it is proposed to carry out a paper based assessment of the top 30 overcrowded properties as set out above. Then the council's Asset Management Team will review these properties and make an initial assessment of their suitability for conversion or an extension (hereafter referred to as 'works'). Factors to be considered will include if the roof space is large enough or whether there is suitable outside space for an extension. At this early stage no internal inspection will be carried out but the property's suitability will be externally assessed without raising the expectations of the residing tenants. These tenants would still receive information on other options open to them to help alleviate their overcrowding.

Once the top 20 suitable properties have been identified, specially trained Officers will visit those households and assess their circumstances to see if works would meet their overcrowding needs. It is recognised that this may be a sensitive subject and expectations will need to be managed in case the property is found to be unsuitable following a full feasibility study. As such officers will be specially trained to be able to advise each household on the range of alternative options open to them.

When considering each household, officers will need to take into account if the household actually wants to move from the area, the nature of the overcrowding, and if this is likely to be alleviated within 3 years of the work being completed eg by a non-dependent leaving the property. The council will want to ensure value for money when investing in these types of works and therefore would not proceed where overcrowding is likely to cease within that time period.

Officers will need to check if the household will be able to afford the new rent and increased energy bills. The works will result in a rent increase linked to the increased number of bedrooms and consideration will be given to installing solar panels, thus reducing energy bills.