

TOWER HAMLETS COMMUNITY HOUSING

Overcrowding Reduction - Policy

1. Statement of Intent

- 1.1 THCH acknowledges the impact of overcrowding and will use a range of methods to tackle overcrowding amongst our residents and in Tower Hamlets.
- 1.2 This policy needs to read in conjunction with any current THCH Overcrowding Strategy.

2. Guidance

2.1 Methods used will include:

- 2.1.1 the use of chain lettings, this is where the letting of one larger home to a family creates an empty property available to let to another family which in turn creates an empty property and so on.
- 2.1.2 lettings through our Overcrowding Strategies; This is where THCH exercises a clause in the Common Housing Register Lettings Policy to allow us to allocate properties to overcrowded families
- 2.1.3 buybacks from leaseholders;
- 2.1.4 a Development Strategy and project appraisal process which promotes the construction of family sized homes;
- 2.1.5 a proactive use of mutual exchange schemes and incentives to under-occupying households.

2.2 When THCH creates a vacancy through one of the following methods the initial let to the property, and any chain of up to 2 subsequent lettings created by the initial letting of the property, will be ring-fenced as part of this policy.

- Infills
- Knockthroughs
- Reclaiming disused or unsuitable amenities or space (e.g. abandoned garages, non-viable shops, or drying areas)
- Cash incentive scheme (to buy out the tenancy)
- Cash allowance for moving to smaller (underoccupying)
- Affordable home ownership (shared ownership, equity schemes, work/live units etc.)
- 3+-way mutual exchange where a vacant property has to be used to make it work
- Mobility outside the Borough through own transfer list
- Properties bought by the landlord on the open market

2.3 THCH will use overcrowding strategies at appropriate times to reduce overcrowding.

- 2.4 THCH has a policy which allows us to buyback leasehold properties in certain circumstances which increases our stock of rented properties.
- 2.5 THCH will have a project appraisal framework which is weighted towards the provision of larger family-sized homes.
- 2.6 When new homes are built as part of a redevelopment scheme, only those units that are a net excess over and above the number of homes for rent to be demolished will be available for ring fencing.
- 2.7 THCH will use Mutual Exchange registers to identify under-occupying households who can be matched against overcrowded households.
- 2.8 THCH will offer cash incentives to under-occupying households to encourage them to move to smaller homes to release larger properties to reduce overcrowding.
- 2.9 Properties suitable for people with disabilities or special needs will not be included in this policy and will continue to be made available on a borough-wide basis.
- 2.10 This policy will be on-going, for any time-limited promise to families as part of an individual Housing Choice transfer offer document.
- 2.11 If this overcrowding policy promise is made in a formal consultation document, then only those on the housing list in overcrowded circumstances on a specified date will be covered by the entitlement. No commitment will be given to independent households that would be defined by the lettings policy as an extended family.
- 2.12 THCH will ensure that any commitment made or initiative undertaken does not compromise its ability to house its target allocation of statutory homeless households as determined in April of each year.
- 2.13 One reasonable offer will be made and if refused no other will be made subsequent to this commitment. If an offer is made in the usual way through the Common Housing Register, it will count to discharge this policy.
- 2.14 The rent account of the person receiving an offer must be clear by the date of viewing. If it is not then the viewing will not proceed, no alternative tenancy will be offered when the rent account is clear and it will be counted as a discharge of this commitment.
- 2.15 One offer of accommodation will be made regardless of choices of area, property type and floor levels chosen (except where the recommendation of a Health Advisor determines otherwise)
- 2.16 For the purposes of this policy, 'living in overcrowded conditions' is defined as lacking one or more bedrooms according to the prevailing Tower Hamlets lettings policy assessment of housing needs.
- 2.17 Offers will be made in the order as determined by the Tower Hamlets Lettings Policy i.e. those tenants with composite needs such as health and overcrowding will be made offers before those where there is only an overcrowding need, then those applicants lacking the most bedrooms will be made offers, then in order of date that the application was registered.
- 2.18 This policy will be reviewed in three years.