

Allocation Communications

Communications relating to the allocations service use a variety of methods and are dependent on the message and the recipient of those messages.

Applications for Housing

Face to Face

Used for initial contact in most instances to include applications for housing, prevention and advice sessions including with Shelter.

Completion of the application to join the Housing Register is also done face to face in council offices however it can be completed by Tenancy Management Officers, Support workers or the applicant in the applicant's home. Development of an online application is on-going.

By Phone

The Housing Needs Support Team provides a dedicated service to give general advice to customers on all areas of the housing including applying for housing, the Allocations Process and Choice-Based Lettings (CBL).

Written Communication

Notification is given in writing by letter or email of inclusion on the register and a CBL bidding pack is posted to applicants included on the Housing Register. The bidding pack includes instructions on how to apply for housing through the CBL and gives detail of the different methods available, including properties using online bidding via the CBL website.

Choice-Based Lettings

Housing applicants can bid online via the CBL website; by telephone (24hours); or text. Vulnerable applicants have a printed list of available properties sent to them each bidding cycle. Staff members are also available to provide assistance to applicants requiring help with CBL. Non bidders, including housing applicants in high housing need in bands 1 and 2 and those requiring an adapted and/or a sheltered property, are contacted by officers when potentially suitable properties become available. To encourage housing applicants to bid for bid suitable properties in order for them to be offered a property(or removed from the list as appropriate).

General Communications

Historically we have posted a printed quarterly newsletter to everyone on the register, however, this has now been discontinued as it is a very costly method of passing on information. The move away from the sub regional allocation agreement gives the Council the option of placing some messages onto the CBL site in the future.

Internal publications such as Your Oxford as well as local press are used to convey information to the wider public; most recently press releases about Universal Credit and the 'Bedroom Tax'. There is a move towards increasing use of social media: FB; Twitter as well as the Council's main web page in liaison with the Corporate Comms team.

Draft Allocations scheme review consultation

The current allocations scheme for Oxford City council was published in July 2009 and is due to be refreshed, in addition to this the Localism Act introduced a number of changes which give Local Authorities additional flexibility in the way which 'waiting lists' are managed and housing is allocated. The changes which are proposed have been incorporated into the Draft Allocations Scheme.

Section 166a(13) HA 1996 requires housing authorities, before adopting an allocation scheme, or altering an existing scheme to reflect a major change of policy, to:

- *send a copy of the draft scheme, or proposed alteration, to every Private Registered Provider with which they have a nomination agreement, and*
- *ensure that these PRPs have a reasonable opportunity to comment on these proposals.*

The Secretary of State considers that housing authorities should include all of those affected by, or who have an interested in, the way social housing is allocated.

In order to meet the requirements of **Housing Act 1996**, consultation was carried out among the following groups:

ORAH members (Registered Providers (RP) of social housing with nomination agreements in the City)
Other RPs with stock held in Oxford
Applicants listed on the Housing Register
Other key stakeholders – including advice & voluntary agencies

Communicating with ORAH members

- A copy of the draft Allocations Scheme and associated documents were sent via email with an invitation discuss and the proposed changes discussed at an ORAH meeting on 16/5/13.
- RPs were given the opportunity to complete an on-line questionnaire or to receive a paper copy. However, ORAH members opted to respond at the meeting on 16/5/13 instead.

Stakeholders

- Applicants on Housing Register
- Postal invite to complete on line or manually
- Dedicated phone line
- Freepost address for return of survey forms
- Dedicated consultation in box for emails.

There needs to be a balance between the adoption of modern communications namely the web and social media and traditional methods such as the phone and written communication. Recent consultation carried out with Oxford City Council tenants indicated that 40% did not have access to the internet at home it is a strong possibility that people on the Housing Register are similarly disadvantaged. In the case of the Allocations consultation 54 people requested paper copies of the survey and completed it manually this equates to 19.85% of responses overall. We have not undertaken research into the reasons for lack of access however these might be a combination of reasons including; affordability, education and training or personal preference.

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