

Watford Borough Council Local Lettings Plan

**Local Authorities Housing Fund –
Rounds 1 & 2**

Introduction:

This Local Lettings Plan (LLP) outlines how Watford Borough Council (WBC), in partnership with Watford Community Housing (WCH) will manage the allocation of additional homes made available through the Local Authorities Housing Fund (LAHF) either through direct acquisition or through making units in existing stock available as a result of purchasing additional properties. The LLP aims to ensure that the properties are assigned in a manner that best meets the needs of our community, particularly those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or living in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

This document covers the following:

Introduction:	2
What is a Local Lettings Plan?	3
Background:	3
Homes Covered by the LLP	4
Details of the Local Lettings Plan:	4
Acquisition and Development of Properties:	4
Collaborations and Partnerships:	5
Prioritisation of Allocation:	5
“The Main Element”	5
“The Bridging Element”	5
“The Resettlement Element”	5
Using Direct Lettings rather than Choice Based Lettings	6
Matching Households with Properties:	6
Management of Properties:	6
Affordability and Tenure:	6
Sustainability:	7
Monitoring and Evaluation:	7
Publishing LLPs	7
Equalities Impact Assessment	7

What is a Local Lettings Plan?

Section 166A(6) of the Housing Act 1996 provides the statutory basis for local lettings policies and LLPs like this one. LLPs can be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and policy objectives if these are in line with the council's Nominations Policy. The council's approach to LLPs is set out in section 14.10 of its current [Nominations Policy](#).

Background:

The LAHF was officially launched on 14th December 2022, and the pertinent details of the fund were communicated to Watford Borough Council in the document titled 'Local Authority Housing Fund – Prospectus and Guidance' ('the Prospectus') - ANNEX 1.

Constituting a £500m capital grant, the first round of the LAHF (LAHF R1) is designed to support selected local authorities in England to obtain and refurbish property in order to provide sustainable housing for those unable to secure their own accommodation and who are here under the following schemes: Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) (collectively referred to as the Afghan Schemes), Ukraine Family Scheme, the Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Extension Scheme (collectively referred to as Ukraine schemes).

The main objectives of the LAHF R1 include:

- Ensuring that recent humanitarian schemes, such as the Afghan and Ukraine schemes, provide adequate long-term housing to those fleeing conflict.
- Assisting areas that are under considerable housing pressure due to the generous acceptance of significant numbers of Ukrainian refugees, in a bid to offset any additional strain on existing housing and homelessness systems.
- Alleviating the anticipated increase in pressure on local authority homelessness and social housing resources as a result of the termination of sponsorship/family placements/bridging accommodation arrangements by increasing the availability of affordable housing to support those at risk of homelessness, or currently residing in temporary accommodation.
- Reducing costs related to emergency, temporary, and bridging accommodation.
- Delivering housing solutions that allow for future conversions of units to accommodate the wider housing and homelessness responsibilities of local authorities towards those customers who are eligible for assistance and on the Housing Register after the initial usage by the eligible cohort comes to an end.
- Using suitable accommodation to facilitate effective resettlement and economic integration of the eligible cohort.
- Reducing strain on existing housing and homelessness systems and those awaiting social housing.

In March 2023, it was announced that the Local Authority Housing Fund would be expanded by £250 million for a second round of funding (LAHF R2 – ANNEX 2, with the majority of the additional funding used to house those on Afghan Schemes currently in bridging accommodation and the rest used to ease wider homelessness pressures.

The objectives of LAHF R2 are to:

- Provide sustainable housing to those on Afghan resettlement schemes at risk of homelessness so that they can build new lives in the UK, find employment and integrate into communities.
- Reduce local housing pressures beyond those on Afghan resettlement schemes by providing better quality temporary accommodation to those owed homelessness duties by local authorities.
- Reduce emergency, temporary and bridging accommodation costs.
- Reduce impact on the existing housing and homelessness systems and those waiting for social housing.

WBC have partnered with WCH to deliver on both rounds of the LAHF initiative.

As both rounds of the LAHF will fund additional housing stock, there will be no detrimental impact to anyone currently on the Housing Register.

Given that both rounds of funding aim to create a lasting supply of affordable housing for the general population, this stock will become available to support the wider local general housing and homelessness responsibilities after the immediate needs of the eligible cohort have been addressed.

Homes Covered by the LLP

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has approved WBC's plan to provide 16 homes (inclusive of one property to be used as temporary accommodation) under LAHF R1 and LAHF R2 and will support this endeavour with a grant of £2,556,106 (a total of both rounds of LAHF funding).

WBC has agreed to deliver a minimum of:

- 11 x properties for households who fall within the Afghan Schemes and the Ukrainian Schemes ('the Main Element') which will be a mixture of one, two and three bedrooms;
- 1 x four+ bedroom property allocated to households currently in Bridging Accommodation ('the Bridging Element');
- 3 x properties for households who fall within the Afghan Schemes ('the Resettlement Element') which will be a mixture of one, two and three bedrooms;

The funding also provides for one property to be utilised as temporary accommodation. However, this property falls outside of the scope for this LLP as its utilisation is not governed by the choice-based lettings process.

Details of the Local Lettings Plan:

Acquisition and Development of Properties:

WBC plans to use the LAHF to work with WCH. WCH will acquire an additional 15 properties and convert them into affordable housing units. There will also be an additional unit purchased that will be utilised as temporary accommodation. However, this unit falls outside the scope of the Local Lettings Plan and the Choice Based Lettings System.

A mixture of some of the newly purchased properties and existing WCH stock, up to the total number of new homes required to be provided, will be utilised to house the specific cohorts mentioned in the objectives above.

Where WCH existing stock is used to house the cohorts, a newly purchased property with at least the same bed space will be provided into the general needs stock and let as any other general needs property. This means this plan will have no adverse impact on the overall numbers of homes available for rent in Watford initially and will provide an additional 15 homes in the longer term for general needs use. This approach is being taken to ensure Watford remains a balanced and mixed community and that new homes are introduced into the general needs provision.

Collaborations and Partnerships:

In addition to its partnership with WCH, WBC will work in close collaboration with neighbouring local authorities, registered providers, and other relevant stakeholders. We will leverage the expertise and resources of our partners to maximize the impact of the LAHF.

Prioritisation of Allocation:

“The Main Element”

Prioritisation of the allocation of housing will be given to those households on the Housing Register who:

- fall within either the Afghan Schemes or the Ukrainian Schemes and
- where WBC are satisfied that the household would be homeless, at risk of homelessness or who live in unsuitable Temporary Accommodation (including bridging accommodation)..

“The Bridging Element”

Prioritisation of the allocation of housing will be given to those households on the Housing Register who:

- fall within the Afghan Schemes and
- are currently in Bridging Accommodation.

“The Resettlement Element”

Prioritisation of the allocation of housing will be given to those households on the Housing Register:

- who fall within the Afghan Schemes and
- who are currently in Bridging Accommodation or
- who have left Bridging Accommodation and where WBC are satisfied that the household would be homeless, at risk of homelessness, or living in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Using Direct Lettings rather than Choice Based Lettings

WBC operates a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system which allows Housing Register applicants to place bids on homes advertised by Registered Providers in Watford. To be able to place bids for properties, you have to be eligible to join WBC's Housing Register as set out in its [Nominations Policy](#). The requirement to be on the WBC's Housing Register will apply to lettings covered by this LLP.

However, the homes covered by this LLP will not be let through the CBL system as the system cannot identify and prioritise the Housing Register applicants who are covered by the objectives of this LLP.

Instead, a direct let process will be used in which the identified LAHF Homes will be offered directly to applicants whom WBC Housing staff can evidence fit the LLP objectives.

Matching Households with Properties:

To ensure the successful allocation of properties, we will make use of WBC's existing housing allocation system.

In the same way as the CBL system works for Housing Register nominees, Housing Register applicants will also be prioritised by band and priority date.

In summary Housing Register applicants will be prioritised for these homes if:

- Their housing circumstances fit the objectives of the LLP;
- Where there is more than one applicant like this, those in the highest bands will be offered a home first;
- Where there is more than one applicant in the same band, those who have waited longest on the Housing Register will be offered a home first.

Before making an offer of housing, WBC's Housing Department will carry out the same checks as it does when it nominates a Housing Register applicant to a registered provider through the CBL system.

The checks include finding out if the applicant has rent arrears, that the applicant is still eligible for an LAHF property, that they are in the right band and their priority date is correct, that the number of people in the household is still the same. Only when WBC is satisfied by all these checks will it make an offer of one of these homes to a relevant Housing Register applicant.

Management of Properties:

WCH will assume full responsibility for the management of properties purchased under LAHF R1 and LAHF R2.

Affordability and Tenure:

All homes delivered through the LAHF will be affordable housing. The exact rent level and tenure of homes will be determined through consultation with WCH, which may include social rent and affordable rents..

All offers of accommodation will be made following an Affordability Assessment carried out by the Welfare Advice Officer, to ensure that the offer is suitable and sustainable.

Sustainability:

WBC aims to ensure that the properties funded through the LAHF will continue to support our housing responsibilities for their lifetime, once the initial needs of the specified Schemes have been addressed.

All initial lets of the 15 units will be made to any eligible clients from the identified cohorts. Any subsequent relets thereafter will continue to be made to any eligible clients from the cohort groups.

In the instance where there is no longer a housing need from the identified cohorts, then the units will no longer be applicable under this LLP and will let under normal CBL processed.

We are committed to maintaining these homes as affordable units even after the immediate needs of the eligible cohort have been addressed.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

The Council will monitor the implementation of this Plan annually. We will conduct evaluations to measure the impact of our efforts and make necessary adjustments to the plan as needed. We will report our progress and share lessons learned with all relevant stakeholders.

By implementing this LLP, WBC is committed to addressing homelessness and improving the quality of temporary accommodation in our area.

Publishing LLPs

To ensure transparency of allocations through LLPs, the LLP will be made available on WBC's website. A paper version of the LLP can be provided on request.

Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed to ensure we do not directly or indirectly discriminate against Housing Register applicants. The key findings are as follows:

"...the implementation of the Local Lettings Plan (LLP) by Watford Borough Council demonstrates a commitment to addressing housing needs and promoting equality within the community.

The LLP aims to provide affordable housing, alleviate housing pressures, and reduce costs associated with temporary and bridging accommodation.

Through this initiative, improved access to affordable housing, stability, and security will be achieved for eligible cohorts, fostering their resettlement and economic integration.

The expansion of affordable housing availability and strengthened collaboration with partners further contribute to the sustainability and inclusivity of the housing strategy.

The utilisation of funding from the Local Authorities Housing Fund ensures that there will be no negative impact on the Housing Register, allowing the acquired properties to be

seamlessly integrated into the general housing needs inventory once the needs of the eligible cohorts have been met.

This proactive approach increases housing opportunities for the entire community, aligning with the principles of equality, fairness, and long-term housing sustainability.

Regular monitoring and evaluation of the LLP's outcomes will ensure ongoing improvements and informed decision-making for future housing initiatives.”

The EIA is available on request.

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ANNEX 1

[Local Authority Housing Fund: Round 1 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

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ANNEX 2

[Local Authority Housing Fund: Round 2 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

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