

Temporary Accommodation Policy

Gravesham Borough Council

This document contains our Temporary Accommodation offer and minimum size criteria.

Document Control

- Responsible Department: Housing Options
- Responsible Manager: Housing Options Manager
- Revision Timeframe: Annually
- Version: December 2023: Management Team Approval

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In line with the Corporate Plan 2019-2023, Gravesham Borough Council strives to make the best use of its stock and we want to provide households with a good quality temporary accommodation.
- 1.2 This document sets out our approach to the placement of households in temporary accommodation both in and outside of Gravesham. It covers interim placements while homelessness enquiries are undertaken, and longer-term temporary accommodation placements for households accepted as homeless.

2. Scope & definition

- 2.1 **Scope** The policy and the associated guidance details how applicants will be prioritised for temporary accommodation in Gravesham, and out of area. This policy does not cover the council's approach to discharging its homelessness duty or the placement into permanent social housing as a secure or assured tenant.
- 2.2 **Definitions** Homelessness applicant – This is a person who completes an application to be assessed as homeless. The definition of legally homeless is set out in the 1996 Housing Act (*as amended*). This policy refers to a homelessness applicant as 'the applicant'.

3. Policy statement

- 3.1 Gravesham Borough Council seeks to accommodate homeless households in Gravesham wherever practicable and will consider the circumstances of individual household needs and suitability of accommodation. However, due to a shortage of affordable housing locally and rising rental costs, an increasing number of households are likely to be placed outside of Gravesham. Accommodation will only be procured outside of the area, when all other reasonable options have been exhausted. An assessment will be carried out to determine the suitability of accommodation.

4. Legal & Regulatory framework

- 4.1 **The Housing Act 1996 Part VII (as amended)**
 - 4.1.1 The Council may have a legal duty to provide temporary accommodation, if there is reason to believe that the applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and has a priority need.
 - 4.1.2 Section 206(1) provides that the authority may discharge their housing duty only by securing "suitable" accommodation, albeit by a variety of routes.
 - 4.1.3 Section 208(1) provides that: "So far as reasonably practicable a local housing authority shall, in discharging their housing duty under this Part, secure that accommodation is available for the occupation of the applicant in their Borough".
- 4.2 **Housing Act 1996 (S208)**

4.2.1 A placing local authority should notify the host local authority when placing a homeless household in their area within 14 days of the accommodation being offered to the household.

4.3 **The Children Act 2004 (s11)**

4.3.1 Local authorities- have a particular duty under act to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

4.4 **The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2012**

In determining whether accommodation is suitable for a person, the local housing authority must consider the location of the accommodation, including.

4.4.1 where the accommodation is situated outside the Borough of the local housing authority, the distance of the accommodation from the Borough of the authority; the significance of any disruption which would be caused by the location of the accommodation to the employment, caring responsibilities or education of the person or members of the person's household.

4.4.2 the proximity and accessibility of the accommodation to medical facilities and other support which —

4.4.3 (i) are currently used by or provided to the person or members of the person's household; and

4.4.4 (ii) are essential to the well-being of the person or members of the person's household; and

4.4.5 (iii) the proximity and accessibility of the accommodation to local services, amenities, and transport.

4.5 **Nzolameso V Westminster City Council 2015**

4.5.1 The Supreme Court case judgment in Nzolameso v Westminster City Council 2015 had significant ramifications for local authorities, who are advised to adopt policies as to the procurement and allocation of temporary accommodation. Care should be taken to ensure that the policies reflect the obligations under section 208, the 2012 Order and the associated statutory guidance and under section 11 of the Children Act 2004.

4.6 **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

4.6.1 Section 206(1) provides that all accommodation provided under Part 7 of the 1996 Act must be suitable for the applicant and their household, and the suitability requirements under section 210 apply.

4.7 **Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities**

- 4.7.1 The code of guidance provides further information about the suitability of the location of accommodation. The code consolidates the existing legislation, case law and good practice.

5. Policy details

- 5.1 The purpose of this Policy is to clarify what the term 'reasonably practicable' (4.1.C) usually means in terms of the suitability of offers made within and outside of the Gravesham area.

The guidance is intended to frame the decisions made in each individual case, having regard to the: –

- 5.1.1 Accessibility of the temporary accommodation location, including transport links to shops and local facilities (e.g., healthcare)
- 5.1.2 Proximity of the temporary accommodation location (and distance to travel) to a place of current employment
- 5.1.3 Proximity of the temporary accommodation location (and distance to travel) to schools, which children are currently attending.
- 5.1.4 The significance of any disruption which would be caused by the location of the accommodation to the employment, caring responsibilities or education of the person or members of the person's household.
- 5.2 The criteria above will be applied based on reasonableness in deciding whether an offer of temporary accommodation is made inside or outside of the Gravesham area. There will be locations near (but outside of) Gravesham which are suitable and accessible to areas within Gravesham. An offer of temporary accommodation in a neighbouring local authority area may be suitable due to good transport links and the proximity to current places of employment, schools etc.
- 5.3 There are a substantial number of applicants who approach the Council seeking assistance who do not originate or have not recently been resident within Gravesham. It may not be reasonably practicable to provide temporary accommodation to every applicant within the Gravesham area, although this depends on current demand and where the household has been living recently. Every case will be considered individually based on risk and suitability, having regard to the criteria above, whilst most households will be offered temporary accommodation in Gravesham, there is likely to be a significant number of households who will be placed in suitable accommodation outside of the Gravesham area.
- 5.4 The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is used to work out how much Housing Benefit a licensee will receive to pay their rent. LHA rates depend on who lives

in the household, and the area they are making their claim in. These areas are called Broad Market Rental Areas (BMRA). Gravesham Borough Council is included within four BMRAs, which are used to calculate LHA rates in the area.

- 5.5 Due to the limited supply of affordable, suitable temporary accommodation in Gravesham, it may be necessary to procure accommodation out of area. Where possible, this accommodation will be in areas neighbouring Gravesham. However, it may be necessary to secure accommodation further away. This will only be sourced when all other reasonable options have been exhausted.
- 5.6 The Council will notify the host local authority when placing a homeless household in their area within 14 days by completing a Section 208 notification.

6. Temporary accommodation offers and refusals

- 6.1 Homeless applicants who are housed under the interim duty to accommodate pursuant to Section 188 Housing Act 1996 (*as amended*) may be placed into accommodation with shared facilities. For urgent situations, Bed and Breakfast accommodation might be used, but in most circumstances for a short period only, until alternative accommodation can be found. For any out of hours placements, Bed & Breakfast accommodation will be used for an interim period until a full assessment can be made.
- 6.2 Wherever possible, the Council will avoid placing families with dependent children; pregnant women; and young people aged 16/17 in bed and breakfast accommodation. Where no other suitable accommodation exists and such placements are necessary, the Council will endeavour to move these households to more suitable accommodation within six weeks.
- 6.3 The council will seek to provide self-contained accommodation to families with children, but where this is not reasonably practicable at the time of a household need for interim accommodation, then temporary accommodation with shared facilities may be provided/offered.
- 6.4 Where the council determines that applicants housed under Section 188 Housing Act 1996 (*as amended*) are not owed the main homelessness duty, they will be asked to leave following reasonable notice, after being notified of the decision. The reasonable notice period is generally 28 days (having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of any children in the family). The cessation of temporary accommodation will always be notified to Children's Services in cases where there are dependent children.
- 6.5 Applicants will be given one offer of suitable, interim, temporary accommodation and they will be asked to accept the offer within 48 hours. In making the offer, the household's individual circumstances will be considered and where possible we will try to arrange a viewing of the home. However, there is no obligation upon the Council to complete a viewing prior to acceptance.

- 6.6 Where applicants refuse an offer of suitable emergency (interim) accommodation (which may be out of area) and the Council does not accept their reasons for refusal, and considers that the offer is suitable, applicants will not be offered further accommodation. The applicant will be required to make

their own arrangements. There is no right of internal review against the suitability of accommodation offered to applicants under Section 188 Housing Act 1996 (*as amended*) (although applicants can apply for judicial review through the courts). For applicants where the council has accepted a rehousing duty under section 193 Housing Act 1996 (*as amended*), (Section 193 duty) there is a right to request an internal review of the suitability decision, pursuant to Section 202 Housing Act 1996 (*as amended*).

- 6.7 Where applicants (towards whom the council has accepted a Section 193 duty), refuse a suitable offer and submits a review request, they will only continue to be accommodated during the review period in exceptional circumstances. Each case will be considered on an individual basis, considering the overall merits of the review request, any new information or evidence that may affect the original decision, and the personal circumstances of the applicant and the potential impact of loss of accommodation.

7. Cost incurred by temporary accommodation

- 7.1 The cost of providing temporary accommodation has increased significantly over the last few years. This is due to several factors including, but not limited, to:
- 7.1.1 Households remaining in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time due to a chronic shortage of housing stock in the private sector and declining social housing stock.
 - 7.1.2 Lack of affordable housing in the private sector being available at an affordable rent level.
 - 7.1.3 Changes in legislation and new priorities for Gravesham Borough Council.
- 7.2 The Housing Act 1996 places a statutory duty on local authorities to provide interim accommodation under Section 188 of the act. It also gives the council the right to make a reasonable charge for the accommodation provided.
- 7.3 It is reasonable for the council to raise a charge equivalent to the relevant local housing allowance rate on all temporary accommodation. It is considered a charge levied at this rate is reasonable. In addition, for households who are temporarily placed within our own stock, it is necessary to add a homeless service charge that covers management of these units.
- 7.4 Homeless households can seek help from Housing Benefit towards the cost of their accommodation. Claims for help with temporary accommodation costs are exempt at present from Universal Credit. Homeless households are be

supported to complete a Housing Benefit form and submit this to the relevant section. It is the responsibility of the household to ensure they supply the Housing Benefit team with any supporting evidence required to complete their claim. In circumstances where an applicant is awarded full Housing Benefit, no further contribution will be required.

- 7.5 Where an applicant is not eligible to receive any help from Housing Benefit, they will be expected to pay a reasonable charge for the accommodation provided. This charge will be at a level equivalent to the relevant Local Housing Allowance.
- 7.6 In the event a charge is due and not received from the applicant, the council will send an arrears letter. If no attempt has been made to resolve the arrears, then a second arrears letter will be sent followed by a final notice of eviction. This will detail their last night in accommodation due to failing to maintain their charge. The council has the right to end the accommodation and discharge the relevant duties.
- 7.7 Where an applicant is placed in self-contained accommodation, they will be responsible for meeting the costs of their utilities and Council Tax. Applicants are able to apply for Council Tax relief. However, they will need to speak with the Council Tax team in the area in which they are placed.
- 7.8 Where there is an opportunity for 'move on', customers' temporary accommodation account charge should be up to date and not have an outstanding balance. Where there are monies owed, the customer will be provided the opportunity to clear this or the offer may be withdrawn.

8. Suitability of Accommodation – Factors to consider

- 8.1 In offering accommodation, the council will assess the suitability of the offer, using the following factors.
 - 8.1.1 **Location** – if suitable affordable accommodation is available in the area, applicants will be housed in Gravesham, allowing them to maintain any established links with services and social/support networks. However, when there is a lack of suitable accommodation or there are higher priority households needing accommodation in Gravesham, outside of Gravesham placements will be used to meet the Council's housing duty (see Section 4). If no suitable accommodation is available in the Gravesham area, attempts will be made to source accommodation locally. If this is not available, the provision of accommodation further afield may have to be considered.
 - 8.1.2 **Size, condition, and facilities** – accommodation must provide adequate space and room standards for the household and be fit to inhabit. Households in temporary accommodation will often be placed into units with 1 bedroom less than they would be entitled to on a permanent basis, with the expectation that the living room provides dual

purpose as a living and sleeping area. In deciding on the fitness of the property, consideration should be given to the length of time needed to complete any necessary repairs and whether it is reasonable to complete these while the property is occupied. The quality of the decoration/furniture, the layout/type of accommodation, provision of parking and lack of access to a garden are extremely unlikely to be acceptable reasons for a refusal.

- 8.1.3 **Health factors** – the Council will consider health factors, such as ability to climb stairs, care and support provided by other statutory agencies or the need to access any specialist medical services that are only available in Gravesham. If the applicant or a member of the resident household is citing medical grounds that were not identified during the initial assessment, the applicant will be asked to submit medical information. The key test in determining the impact of medical issues is whether the condition itself makes the housing offered unsuitable. Problems such as depression, asthma, diabetes, or back pain would not normally make a property unsuitable, as the problems would persist in any sort of accommodation. However, any medical problems will be reviewed in line with the Council’s legislative duties.
- 8.1.4 **Education** - attendance at local schools will not be considered a reason to refuse accommodation, though some priority will be given to special educational needs and students who are close to taking public examinations in determining priority for placements in Gravesham.
- 8.1.5 **Employment** – the Council will consider the need of applicants, who are in paid employment, to reach their normal workplace from the accommodation that is secured. This will include having a regard to both travelling time and the costs associated with this travel.
- 8.1.6 **Proximity to schools and services** - The Council will consider the proximity to schools, public transport, primary care services, and local services in the area in which the accommodation is located.
- 8.1.7 **Safeguarding** - The Council will seek to identify the welfare of any children in the household, including any needs of the children and promote their welfare in making decisions on whether the offer is suitable.
- 8.1.8 **Special circumstances** - The Council will consider any other reasons put forward by the applicant and come to an overall view about whether the offer is suitable.

9. Criteria for prioritising placements inside/outside Gravesham Borough Council

- 9.1 Gravesham Borough Council aim to accommodate all households within the borough where it is safe do so dependent on such accommodation being

available. However, some households may be housed outside of Gravesham, it will be increasingly necessary to make decisions about the suitability of out of area placements for individual households and balance these against the type and location of temporary accommodation that can be offered.

- 9.2 In some cases, housing out of area can be more sustainable for the household in the longer term, with lower rents allowing them to better meet their subsistence and household costs, and avoid rent arrears. Attempts will be made to find a suitable alternative as close as possible to where the household were previously living. Evidence of this search will be recorded.
- 9.3 If accommodation cannot be sourced in or immediately adjoining Gravesham borough, the principal needs of the individual household must be acknowledged, including adults and children, and assessed both individually and collectively when determining the location of accommodation.
- 9.4 Written evidence and explanation should be recorded and given on a case-by-case basis when making out of area placements, acknowledging each household's collective and individual needs.
- 9.5 Households must be given sufficient time to decide on an out of area offer, when no alternatives are available and thorough information regarding the proposed area must be provided.
- 9.6 Priority for accommodation within, or in areas immediately adjoining Gravesham borough will be given to:
 - 9.6.1 An applicant or a member of their household with a severe and enduring health condition requiring intensive and specialist medical treatment where a move from Gravesham Borough would disrupt that treatment and continuity of care.
 - 9.6.2 An applicant or a member of their household who are in receipt of a significant package and range of health care options that cannot easily be transferred.
 - 9.6.3 An applicant or a member of their household with a severe and enduring mental health problem who is receiving psychiatric treatment and aftercare provided by community mental health services and have an established support network where a transfer of care would severely impact on their wellbeing.
 - 9.6.4 Applicants who have as part of their household a child registered on the Child Protection Register in Gravesham borough, who are linked into local services, and where it is confirmed that a transfer to another area would adversely impact on their welfare.
 - 9.6.5 Applicants who have as part of their household a child with special educational needs who is receiving education or educational support in

Gravesham borough, where change would be detrimental to their well-being.

- 9.6.6 An applicant or a member of their household who have a longstanding arrangement to provide care and support to another family member in Gravesham Borough who is not part of the resident household and would be likely to require statutory health and social support if the care ceased.
- 9.6.7 An applicant or a member of their household who have a formal arrangement to receive housing related or other support, including addiction help or recovery, and where a move from Gravesham borough would disrupt that support.
- 9.6.8 Any other special circumstances will also be considered (including any particular needs of the children in the household not already identified in a) to g) above).
- 9.7 Whilst priority will be given for these placements, this is dependent on such accommodation being available.
- 9.8 Priority for placements within neighbouring areas in locations that might not be immediately adjoining Gravesham Borough, will be given to:
 - 9.8.1 Applicants who have as part of their household, a child or children who are enrolled in GCSE, AS, or A level courses or post 16 vocational qualifications (for example BTEC) in Gravesham borough, with exams to be taken within the academic year. Wherever practicable, we will seek to place such households within 60 minutes' travelling distance of their school or college.
 - 9.8.2 Wherever practicable, an applicant or a member of their household who works for more than 16 hours a week will not be placed more than 90 minutes travelling distance, from the place of their employment. Consideration will also be given to the affordability of the travel arrangements needed to reach the place of employment. This will include women who are on maternity leave from employment.
 - 9.8.3 An applicant or a member of their household who is in higher or adult education, vocational or professional training, a recognised apprenticeship, self-employed with a business predominantly in Gravesham borough, have a confirmed start date to commence employment in Gravesham borough or are enrolled in a Gravesham Borough work readiness programme. Any other special circumstance will be considered (including and particular needs of the children in the household not already identified).
- 9.9 Applicants who meet none of the above criteria may be offered properties outside of Gravesham. Efforts will be made to reduce the distance from Gravesham to a minimum but the supply of accommodation at any point in time will vary considerably.

- 9.10 If placed outside of Gravesham borough or immediately adjoining areas, the council will provide as much detail as possible about the accommodation that they are being offered.
- 9.11 To support the transition to a new area, the council will check whether the family has any involvement with other services. Where no existing support has been identified, the council may offer support to people after their move for a reasonable period, on a case-by-case basis. This may include:
- 9.11.1 Information about their new local area, for example details regarding local authority services, health services, access to places of worship, or the ethnic and religious make-up of that area
 - 9.11.2 Information on places where parents can get involved with community groups, social activities for their children, and other groups or networks of support
 - 9.11.3 Information on travel and transport, especially back to their home area.
 - 9.11.4 Identifying and arranging schools.
 - 9.11.5 Health, for example signing up with a local GP.
 - 9.11.6 Council links, for example Council Tax, electoral register.
 - 9.11.7 Welfare benefits.
 - 9.11.8 Removals and assistance with identifying appropriate storage.
 - 9.11.9 Financial assistance with immediate resettlement costs, possibly through Local Welfare Provision.
- 9.12 The package of support will be kept under review and amended as required to ensure the provision of appropriate support.

10. Equality and diversity

- 10.1 The Council has a statutory duty to have due regard to the need to promote disability, race & gender equality.
- 10.2 The Council should also be proactive about putting in place arrangements to ensure that they do not unfairly discriminate against individuals on the grounds of their age, religion, personal relations or living and caring arrangements, or whether they live in an urban or rural area. Equality should be integral to the way in which social care is prioritised and delivered.
- 10.3 The potential impact of this policy on the various protected characteristics has been identified and addressed through an Equality Impact Assessment.

11. Monitoring & Reporting Arrangements

- 11.1 Monitoring will be included within the performance framework of the Adult Services Directorate and officers will monitor the outcomes of the policy to help assess the success of it.
- 11.2 The Council continuously monitors the number of households in temporary accommodation to ensure that budgetary pressures can be monitored and reported upon. The analysis of this data will be used to procure appropriate temporary accommodation to ensure that appropriate provision is made in respect of long-term housing options.

12. Responsibilities & reviews

- 12.1 The Housing Options Manager will be responsible for overseeing the delivery and monitoring of this policy.
- 12.2 The Policy will be monitored and reviewed formally in line with the Homelessness Strategy to ensure effectiveness. If changes are required, these will be made as and when necessary. The Policy may also be reviewed at any time, in line with any relevant changes in legislation or Guidance issued by relevant Government.

Appendix 1 – Minimum Size Criteria

Accommodation must provide adequate space and room standards for the household and be fit to inhabit, containing no category 1 hazards within the meaning of the Housing Act 2004 Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Households in temporary accommodation will often be placed into units with less than they would be entitled to on a permanent basis, with the expectation that the living room provides dual purpose as a living and sleeping area.

Section 210 of the Housing Act 1996 requires that local authorities should have regard to Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985 and accommodation should not be statutorily overcrowded. Accommodation will vary in terms of the furniture and equipment provided. The Council are not obliged to provide furnished accommodation, and most will be unfurnished.

The following minimum size criteria apply although larger, family sized shared accommodation units in Council owned/managed accommodation might be considered differently on a short-term basis.

Non-self-contained accommodation

- Single applicants (excluding care leavers)
- Couples

Studio/Bedsit

- Lone parent or couple pregnant
- Lone parents with a child under 1 year

One bedroom accommodation

- Couples with 1 child over the age of 10 years (no upper age limit).
- Lone parent with a child aged over 10 and of the opposite sex to the parent.

Two Bedroom accommodation

- Couples with 2 children of the same sex (up to the age of 18).
- Couples with 2 children of opposite sexes where both children are under the age of 10 years.
- Lone parents with 2 children of opposite sexes where 1 is over the age of 10 years.
Two-bedroom accommodation
- Couples with 2 children of opposite sexes where one is over the age of 10 years.
- Lone parent with 2 children of opposite sexes where both are aged over 10 years.

Three-bedroom accommodation

- Lone parents & couples with between 3 & 6 children.

Four-bedroom accommodation

- Lone parents or couples with more than 6 children.