Appendix 2

North Herts Council

Temporary accommodation placement policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out North Herts Council's approach to the placement of homeless households in temporary accommodation, whether within or outside of the district, and details how suitability requirements will be met

1.2 The policy covers both interim temporary accommodation placements made under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996, whilst homelessness inquiries are undertaken, and longer term temporary accommodation placements for households accepted as homeless under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996.

1.3 In developing this placement policy, the Council has taken into account the following:

- the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), including Sections 206, 208 and 210;
- relevant case law;
- the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Orders 1996, 2003 and 2012;
- relevant government guidance, including the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities;
- section 11 of the Children Act 2004;
- the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026; and
- the Equality Act 2010.

1.4 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's most recent Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (encompassed within our Housing Strategy 2024 -2029), which sets out our priorities and plans for securing that sufficient accommodation is available for local homeless households.

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 The Council aims to ensure that sufficient temporary accommodation is available to meet the needs of local homeless households and that temporary accommodation is suitable for the needs of individual households in line with legal duties and statutory guidance.

2.2 All offers of temporary accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis, following consideration of the individual applicant's needs and circumstances to ensure that accommodation is suitable for the household[1], in accordance with relevant legislation and government guidance.

2.3 Wherever reasonably practicable, the Council will provide suitable temporary accommodation within North Hertfordshire, unless there is a specific reason why

[1] Including all members of the household who would normally reside with the applicant or who might reasonably be expected to reside with them.

a household should not be accommodated within the district (most commonly where applicants are at risk of domestic abuse or other violence).

2.4 In instances where suitable temporary accommodation cannot be secured within the district, the Council will seek to make an out of area placement as close as possible to the district boundaries or to where the applicant was previously living. Wherever practicable, the Council will aim to minimise the time spent in out of area accommodation and offer a suitable in-district placement when availability arises.

3. Availability of and demand for temporary accommodation

3.1 The Council no longer owns any housing stock and is therefore reliant on housing provider partners to bring forward opportunities for additional provision. The current stock of purpose-built temporary accommodation in the district is owned and managed for the Council by a local housing provider, Lifestone Homes. This comprises just under 80 units of accommodation, mostly for families, with a small number of units for single people.

3.2 Demand for the Council's homelessness services is likely to remain high into the foreseeable future and the risk of increased homelessness due to ongoing cost of living pressures (amongst others) is flagged as a risk in our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan [LINK]. Temporary accommodation for single households is a particular pressure point given the profile of our purpose-built stock. Our Action Plan includes measures to continue to target prevention of homelessness, reducing the number of households who will need temporary accommodation. It also includes plans to further bolster our single homeless pathway which has increased in capacity over recent years but remains vulnerable to pressures for on-the-day and move-on accommodation in particular.

3.3 Temporary accommodation within purpose-built stock in North Herts is therefore currently supplemented by flexible use of nightly paid accommodation (such as hotels) when full capacity is reached or where a household's needs cannot be met in the available accommodation. The Council will source alternative suitable temporary accommodation which best meets the household's needs and circumstances and includes nightly paid accommodation which may be outside of the district.

3.4 It should also be noted that there is high demand for affordable housing in the district and there are typically around 2,000 households registered to bid for affordable housing at any one time. In contrast, last year, just over 400 lets to affordable housing were made[2]. Households owed a main housing duty may therefore have to remain in temporary accommodation for some time, until a suitable affordable let becomes available. The Council may also discharge its main housing duty via a private rented sector offer[3].

3.5 The availability and use of temporary accommodation is kept under review as an action under the Council's Housing Strategy and we continue to explore options to increase capacity. These are, however, heavily dependent on the availability of government grant funding and viable local sites. Long-term plans for the

[2] See our website for latest statistics on local affordable housing lets. CHECK LINKS

[3] See also our website for Private Rented Sector Offer policy.

delivery of good quality temporary accommodation will also be informed by the forthcoming Supported Housing Strategy and the needs assessment undertaken as part of this.

4. Suitability of temporary accommodation

4.1 The Council will provide suitable temporary accommodation placements for homeless households in line with legislation and statutory guidance. The placement of homeless applicants and an assessment of the suitability of temporary accommodation will always be made on an individual, case by case basis.

4.2 Placements of temporary accommodation will be made based on the facts available to the Council at the time that duty is discharged, however the Council has a continuing obligation to keep the suitability of accommodation under review and to respond to any relevant change in circumstances which may affect suitability.

4.3 Suitability of accommodation is covered in detail by the Homelessness Code of Guidance which explains that space and arrangement will be key factors in determining the suitability of accommodation, in light of the relevant needs, requirements and circumstances of the homeless person and their household. Location of accommodation will also be a relevant factor (section 5 below addresses this in more detail), as is affordability of accommodation.

4.4 Accommodation should be safe and healthy and as a minimum be free of Category 1 hazards. The Council will require confirmation of this from accommodation providers and undertake on-site visits where appropriate.

Households with children

4.5 The Council will ensure that cots are made available for children under the age of two and that accommodation has adequate space for a cot.

4.6 The Council will notify schools, GP practices and health visiting services when a child is placed in temporary accommodation.

5. Out of district placements

5.1 The Council will secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, suitable temporary accommodation within North Hertfordshire district when it is discharging its housing functions under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. This is in accordance with section 208(1) of the 1996 Act.

5.2 However, as set out at paragraph 3.3 above, there will be occasions when it is not reasonably practicable to secure suitable temporary accommodation within the district. This is either because of lack of capacity locally (usually for single person placements) or because available accommodation is not suitable for an individual's (or their household members') needs.

5.3 Where out of district placements are made, these will usually be placements made under the interim accommodation duty, whilst we carry out inquiries, and their duration will be minimised as far as is reasonably practicable. We will aim to mitigate disruption to a household's support and essential services, in particular

health services, education and other vital support networks where relevant. Further details are provided in section 7.

5.4 In other circumstances, there may be specific reasons why a household should be accommodated outside of the district. Examples include where an applicant (and/or a member of their household) would be at risk of domestic abuse or other violence in the district or to enable ex-offenders to break links with negative contacts in the district.

5.5 The Council will notify the authority whose district the accommodation is situated in of the placement.

6. Safeguarding vulnerable people

6.1 Where there are concerns for the wellbeing of an individual, the Council will make safeguarding referrals to Hertfordshire County Council in line with established procedures. The Council will work with all relevant partners including adult social care, children's services, health and police in order to seek the best outcomes for individuals.

6.2 If a household is placed outside of the district, the Council will ensure that relevant agencies are alerted as soon as possible in order to ensure that vulnerable people are appropriately supported.

6.3 The Council is particularly mindful of our duties regarding the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This includes minimising the disruption to the education of children and young people especially at critical points in time such as leading up to taking GCSE (or their equivalent) examinations.

7. Suitability of out of district placements

7.1 Government guidance sets out the factors that the Council must consider when assessing the suitability of temporary accommodation. Overarching considerations which are particularly pertinent to location include:

Affordability The Council will take into account whether accommodation is affordable to the applicant. This will include consideration of whether they can afford to pay for their temporary accommodation without being deprived of basic essentials such as food, clothing, heating and transport.

North Hertfordshire, in common with many areas across the region, faces a high demand for housing with a resulting shortage of local affordable accommodation in the private sector. Nightly paid accommodation out of district may therefore in some cases be more suitable for an individual household than in-district accommodation.

Distance from North Hertfordshire The Council will aim to secure temporary accommodation as close as possible to the district based on the practicality of sourcing units on any given day. We have established working relationships with a number of accommodation providers who provide accommodation of a reasonable standard, including some who are located in neighbouring districts/boroughs. If an out of district placement is required, we will normally approach one of these providers and will always seek to move the household back to the district at the earliest opportunity.

Distance from last settled accommodation The Council will take this into consideration where there are established links with schools, doctors, social workers and other key services and support. Note that in some instances, placements outside of the district might be closer to where the applicant was previously living.

7.2 In determining the suitability of a placement, the time likely to be spent in that accommodation will also be taken into account. A placement may be suitable for a short period, for example accommodation used to discharge an interim duty pending inquiries, or a placement made on an emergency basis, but may not be suitable for a longer period. Every effort will be made to minimise disruption to support and essential services in particular health services, education and other vital support networks where relevant.

7.3 In addition, in assessing whether an out of area placement would be suitable for a household, the Council will take into consideration the following factors set out in paragraphs 7.4 – 7.8. Households meeting these criteria will be prioritised for temporary accommodation within the district, subject to suitable units being available. It is important to note that this does not mean that such households are guaranteed to receive an offer of accommodation within North Herts. If they are placed out of district however, they will receive priority for a suitable offer of temporary accommodation within the district as soon as is reasonably practicable to do so. Note also that a final assessment will be dependent upon a consideration of all the factors pertinent to suitability including those set out at paragraphs 7.1 – 7.2.

7.4 Households with children at secondary school in the district As part of its duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, the Council will aim to minimise disruption to the education of children and young people, particularly at critical points in time such as leading up to taking GCSE exams and other national level qualifications.

7.5 Households requiring medical facilities and other support locally The Council will consider the potential impact on an household if such facilities or support were no longer accessible following an out of area placement. The availability of alternative facilities will be considered.

7.6 Households requiring social services support or a need to maintain links with other essential services in the district Particular consideration will be given to applicants with a mental illness or learning disability who have a particular need to remain in the district and to families with children who are subject to safeguarding arrangements.

7.7 Caring responsibilities Households with a long standing arrangement to provide care and support to another family member in the district and where that family member would be likely to require statutory health and social care support if the support arrangement ceased. Priority for a local placement will be considered where there are no other relatives able to provide this care and no other suitable alternative arrangements are available.

7.8 Disruption to employment Where possible, the Council will aim to place households with a member(s) in permanent and settled employment in temporary accommodation as close as possible to their place of work.

8. Offers of accommodation and right to review

8.1 When making an offer of temporary accommodation, the Council will make it clear in the offer letter why it considers the property to be suitable, taking into account the needs of the applicant (and their household).

8.2 Applicants will be given a reasonable amount of time to consider offers of accommodation outside of the district. This will take into account how familiar the applicant might be with the area offered and the length of time the applicant is likely to be living there.

8.3 Applicants have a right to ask for a statutory review of the suitability of temporary accommodation offered to them under the main housing duty provisions (ie longer term temporary accommodation placements). The right to review applies whether or not an applicant accepts the temporary accommodation. Applicants do not however have the right to ask for a statutory review of the suitability of interim temporary accommodation, but such decisions may be subject to judicial review in the High Court.