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Housing Allocation Policy Undergoes Updates

In a bid to modernize the housing allocation process and enhance the efficiency of social housing distribution, the Council adopted a series of amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy and Choice Based Letting Scheme. These changes aim to align the policy with recent legislative updates, reinforce penalties for fraudulent activity, and refine financial thresholds for eligibility.

Cllr Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee (RA Ewell Village) introduced the item at its meeting on 10th October: "It's over six years since this was last reviewed significantly, and the changes proposed to the policy are intended to introduce considerable more flexibility so that we can widen the range of people that we can assist through the scheme. So, the committee has been asked to review it and say whether they agree with the various changes that are being made".

During the discussion Cllr Woodbridge asked: "How has the Domestic Abuse Act changed the way we have to implement our policy, and how is that reflected in the document before us tonight?" The Council Officer explained: "Our previous policy was compliant anyway, it just didn't make a particular reference to The Domestic Abuse Act. We have exceptions within the allocation policy which allow us to look at each case on a case-by-case basis. However, the housing needs register is a waiting list and often it can't address people who have an urgent need for rehousing, so often the more appropriate route for people who are at immediate risk of domestic abuse is to go through the housing options process. However, the policy is designed so we don't put barriers up for those that do want to be on our housing needs register, so it doesn't have a requirement to have lived in our borough and is flexible to take those needs into account."

Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford Ward) expressed her concern about the position of "care leavers" (persons who have been in care between the ages of 16 and 25 who lived in care for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birsthday) and asked that each such applicant for housing was considered flexibly and treated on a "case by case" basis. The officer responded that "At a practical level we would always treat each case on a "case by case basis"". She added that the care leaver policy was being looked at on a Surrey wide basis.

In December 2014, a joint Social and Strategy and Resources committee approved fundamental changes to the existing Housing Allocation Policy. The policy governs how housing needs are prioritized, Housing Needs Register applications are assessed, and social housing is allocated. Following extensive consultations with key stakeholders, the revised Housing Allocation Policy was formally endorsed and implemented in June 2015.

While the policy has effectively met its intended goals, certain aspects are now due for review to ensure its continued relevance and responsiveness to current challenges. Consequently, several adjustments to qualifying and non-qualifying criteria, along with administrative procedures, have been proposed to keep the policy up-to-date. The key changes include:

- 1. Fraud & False Information:
 - Revisions to the qualifying criteria and penalties for applicants involved in fraudulent applications or false information. These changes will align with the ongoing efforts of Reigate and Banstead's Fraud Investigation team.
- 2. Legislative Compliance:
 - Ensuring the Housing Allocation Policy complies with evolving legislation, statutory guidance, and case law.
- 3. Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols:
 - Adapting the policy to any adjustments in joint protocols implemented across Surrey.
- 4. Financial Qualifying Criteria:
 - Reviewing the financial criteria for inclusion on the Housing Needs Register. The current thresholds, set in 2015, restrict single people or couples without dependent children with gross annual earnings of £25,000 or more and couples or single parents with dependent children with gross annual earnings of £50,000 or more.

Proposed Changes:

- Fraud & False Information: Strengthened criteria and penalties for applicants making fraudulent applications. Disqualification from the Housing Needs Register for two years for fraudulent applicants and five years for those convicted of fraud or deception.
- Legislative Compliance: Updates to reflect changes in legislation and statutory guidance affecting the Housing

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Allocation Policy.

- Alignment with Surrey-Wide Protocols: Incorporating changes introduced in the Surrey Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Financial Qualifying Criteria: Adjusting the income thresholds, increasing the current £25,000 gross annual earnings for single people/couples without dependent children to £40,000, and the £50,000 threshold for couples/single parents with dependent children to £65,000.

These adjustments are backed by a recent benchmarking exercise across Surrey, which highlights the need to ensure a balanced mix of households reliant on welfare benefits and those employed, especially for one-bedroom properties. Additionally, the proposed income thresholds align with the income levels at which applicants would no longer qualify for welfare benefits or universal credit.

Furthermore, the changes aim to address the challenges faced by low-income households in private rental accommodation, who are often limited by the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, causing a substantial shortfall between LHA rates and median private sector rents.

The proposed adjustments are a comprehensive attempt to modernize the Housing Allocation Policy, making it more equitable, responsive, and reflective of the current housing landscape. The committee unanimously adopted the revised policy.

Improving housing improvements for the vulnerable

10th October Epsom and Ewell Council's **Community and Wellbeing Committee** agreed a Revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy to Expand Support for Vulnerable Residents.

The item was introduced by committee Chair **Clir. Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village). In response to updated central government guidelines, the local Council is poised to adopt a more flexible and proactive approach to assist a broader range of households through its revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy. The move comes as a result of increased funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) program via the Better Care Fund. This additional funding has enabled the Council to harness the powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO) to introduce a Discretionary Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy, aiming to provide support for vulnerable residents.

The existing policy has proven effective in the past but is now undergoing revision as the Council finds itself with a significant surplus of DFG funds, providing an opportunity to extend its assistance further. Notably, central government's guidance, released in March 2022, has directed the Council to utilize the discretionary powers within the RRO to meet the needs of disabled and vulnerable individuals in the community more comprehensively. This flexibility includes adaptations to means test requirements and grant caps, while also offering discretionary financial aid for purposes such as home safety and hospital discharge support.

The Council's objective is to ensure equitable and accessible financial support reaches a wide array of residents. To achieve this, a revised policy is being proposed to accommodate an increased number of vulnerable residents.

Background:

- The Council's responsibilities concerning financial assistance for repair and adaptations are regulated by the Housing Grants, Construction, and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO).
- The Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy was first introduced in 2018.
- The Council annually receives ringfenced central government funding for DFGs, totaling £785,282 in the last three years. Local authorities are encouraged to maximize the use of their discretionary powers under the RRO to respond to local needs, necessitating the formulation of a published policy.
- In the fiscal year 2022/23, the Home Improvement Agency collaborated with various organizations to enhance the promotion of their services and grants, leading to the completion of 43 DFGs worth £616,000 for a wide range of adaptations, including level access showers, stairlifts, ramps, and wheelchair accessible extensions. The handyperson

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service completed 241 jobs, addressing needs such as grab rails, minor repairs, and garden clearances.

- The integration of services between Housing, Social & Adult Care, and the National Health Service aims to support vulnerable households in remaining in their homes whenever possible.
- Poor housing can be a significant barrier for vulnerable, elderly, and disabled individuals, contributing to immobility, social exclusion, ill health, and depression. Housing assistance policies can mitigate these challenges by enabling people to live independently in secure, well-maintained, and suitable housing.

Proposed Policy Changes:

The Council's revised policy includes several notable changes to better support residents:

- Broadened eligibility criteria, including the removal of means test requirements for prevention grants and the inclusion of council tax support as a passporting benefit to streamline access.
- A more flexible application process and forms.
- A new exceptions clause for individualized case handling.
- An increased maximum grant level to account for rising construction costs and complex needs.
- Assistance extended to those with terminal illnesses and dementia.
- Introduction of loans from the Parity Trust for cases requiring additional funds or where grant requirements aren't met.
- Accessible housing grants to meet the growing demand in the housing market for disabled individuals who are either homeless or in need of more suitable properties.
- Addition of a prevention grant to enhance health and safety in homes in alignment with the NHS and Social and Adult Care.

The Council's commitment to expanding its support through this revised policy reflects its dedication to fostering safer, more accessible housing options for vulnerable residents.

The revised policy was unanimously agreed by the committee.

Land, plan and a scam mess for Tandridge

A land scam, £3.5million spent and residents being "ignored" have come to a head as a district council finally looks set to call an end to its 6,000-home local plan.

As well as uneven development between the north and south of Tandridge, councillors raised concerns about the draft plan not looking enough at necessary infrastructure.

After a drawn-out process including hearings in public, the abandoned garden village planned for Godstone and terse public exchanges with the government's planning inspector, the council's leader declared the plan "dead".

A meeting of the district council's planning policy committee on Thursday (September 21) decided to ask the inspector for a final report, despite an additional bill of around £12,000, rather than withdrawing the plan.

Of the options in front of members, the council's leader said: "In either case, the plan is dead."

The inspector told the council in July he did not "see a route to soundness for the local plan", but at a meeting after that the council put forward options to find a way forward.

The local plan, which set out where and when homes will be built across the district until 2033, was submitted to government for examination in January 2019.

There was a change of administration in May 2021, when a minority administration of residents' associations took control of the

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council.

The current leader, Councillor Catherine Sayer (Residents' Alliance, Oxted North and Tandridge), said she thought the local plan system was "totally unfit for purpose".

With a government funding bid for works to improve junction 6 of the M25 failing, central to the plans for a new garden village, she said there was "a big question mark over why the planning inspector did not end the process at that point".

Cllr Sayer told the meeting: "In an attempt to avoid ending up with no plan at all and the threat that would mean to the green belt together with a huge waste of taxpayers' money, we tried to salvage something.

"We proposed amendments and deleted the garden community and attempted to do whatever else the planning inspector had indicated might make the plan acceptable."

The leader also told the meeting it was "common knowledge" that some of the green belt land planned for the garden community had been part of a land scam where more than 350 small plots were sold on an investment basis.

She said: "Most of the owners are believed to reside in India and Pakistan. To enable the garden community to go ahead, it would have been likely that the council would have needed to use its compulsory purchase powers to assemble the land."

She said asking for a report from the inspector could "bring some kind of useful closure to what is such an unhappy and costly chapter for Tandridge District".

Councillor Jeremy Pursehouse (Independent, Warlingham East Chelsham & Farleigh) said he was "very sad to see the demise of the garden community" which he said balanced out planned development across the north and the south of district. He said: "We can't put everything in Warlingham and Caterham, it just doesn't work like that. It will just make people who are living in suburban areas further away from the green of the countryside, we have to share these things around."

He said the north of the district did not have the infrastructure for the kinds of development being looked at in the plan.

Councillor Mick Gillman (Residents' Alliance, Burstow, Horne & Outwood) said he lived in the south of the district, which did not have the railways of the north, and described the A22 as "a car park much of the time". He added: "It's driven by infrastructure, and you've got to put a lot of money into the infrastructure in the south to get it up to speed."

But he also highlighted his reasons he thought it was important to get a report from the inspector.

Cllr Gillman said the council owed it to residents to justify why more than £3.5m had been spent on "something that has failed". He added: "What's even more concerning to me is many of the reasons that the inspector flagged up were those that were flagged up by residents in the consultation process and they were ignored. And I think residents need to know that they did not get it wrong, and it was the organisation within the council that got it wrong."

The meeting unanimously agreed to ask the inspector for a report, rather than withdrawing the plan, and will recommend this to council. Full council will debate the next steps for the plan, its next scheduled meeting is on Thursday, October 19.

Photo: Catherine Sayer Tandridge District Council leader. Image credit Darren Pepe/Surrey Live.

Gove flexing his muscle on a Local Plan?

A last-minute intervention from **Michael Gove** continued the uncertainty around the Surrey Borough Council of **Spelthorne**'s plan for 9,000 new homes. The **Surrey Heath MP** ordered the council not to pause its local plan, in a letter sent by the housing and planning minister, limiting Spelthorne's options at a crucial meeting.

After what the council's chief executive described as an urgent ministerial meeting at 3pm on Thursday (September 15), a letter was sent to the council's leader setting out Mr Gove's intentions.

An extraordinary meeting of the council on the same day was set to vote on the options to continue with the plan, keep it on pause, or withdraw it altogether. The plan has been on pause since councillors asked the government inspector for a hiatus in June, after hearings had started at the end of May.

The letter from MP **Rachael Maclean** stated Mr Gove had legal powers to intervene if necessary if he thought an authority was "failing or omitting to do anything it is necessary to do" regarding preparing, revising or adopting its local plan.

While the chamber was told voting to withdraw its plan, outlining where new homes will be built in the borough up to 2037, was no longer a lawful action, councillors ultimately voted to extend the pause on the plan.

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They also voted to seek further legal advice to "confirm the validity of the minister's directive".

The council voted by 20 votes to 16 to extend the pause, pending the publication of changes to national policy, due this autumn.

The council's leader, Councillor **Joanne Sexton** (Independent Spelthorne Group, Ashford East) said the council would seek further clarification from Mr Gove on the reasons behind the direction. She added: "We will endeavour, in the name of democracy, that we will produce a plan benefiting the residents of Spelthorne by the government's deadline of June 2025."

Cllr Sexton said unresolved flood issues in Staines, a plan that delivered "beautiful places" and with the "communities at the heart of it" were some of the concerns and reasons behind the plan that would be made clear to the government.

The question of the cost to the council of seeking further legal advice was also raised. Councillor **Karen Howkins** (Conservative, Laleham and Shepperton Green) asked how much money further legal advice relating to the local plan would cost. She asked: "Haven't we spent enough on legal advice regarding the local plan, haven't we wasted enough money? Isn't it time that we stopped wasting money that we haven't got?"

Officers confirmed the cost of further legal advice should be "not more" than £2,000.

While other councillors raised the "cost to the local community" both of putting through the "wrong plan" or of further delays.

The current draft plan allocates more than 5,400 of the borough's 9,270 new homes to be built in Staines.

Councillor **Howard Williams** (Independent Spelthorne Group, Staines) said of the council's plans to pause its own house building projects indefinitely that it impacted around a third of the flats planned for Staines. The current plan did not protect the green belt, he said, did "nothing" to deliver affordable or social housing and included more than 5,000 flats be built where they were "likely to flood".

He asked the meeting: "If we stick to the current targets of building 9,000 flats, where are all the flats that can't now be built in Staines going to go instead? Sunbury, Stanwell, Ashford, Shepperton? They will all have to be built in other towns in the borough. So setting unrealistic targets for Staines does not protect other people's towns or the green belt. That is a fallacy."

Spelthorne's neediest lose out on housing

"Those who need it most" will be the people who suffer most from a council's plans to abandon its home building projects, according to one councillor.

Spelthorne is a Surrey Borough and its main town is Staines-Upon-Thames. Epsom and Ewell Times occasionally publishes reports about other Surrey districts as they enlighten issues all Councils can face and contrast with experience in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell.

Rising interest rates adding £360million to the cost of developments, increased construction costs and reduced building heights have all contributed to the shelving of the council's projects.

It means **Spelthorne Borough Council** is likely to halt projects to provide affordable and social housing and homes for key workers in the borough, where there are nearly 4,000 people on the housing register.

The authority had plans for developments at Oast House and Thameside House in Staines, as well as at the White House in Ashford and Benwell House in Sunbury.

Those developments will now be stopped "to protect the council" from the increased costs.

Meeting documents show the council's group leaders had decided it was not appropriate for the council to "directly bear the risk and additional financial exposure" from increased borrowing to deliver the schemes.

Ashford North and Stanwell South Councillor Sean Beatty (Labour) said his ward was not only one of the poorest in the borough, but in the whole county. He described it as "extremely galling" that whether in the short, medium, or long term the people who would suffer would be those who needed housing.

Cllr Beatty told a meeting of the council's corporate policy and resources committee on Monday (September 11) that the only

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people that would build social housing would be the council. He added that in his experience "very, very rarely" would private providers build social housing. He told the meeting: "It really concerns me that the people in Spelthorne who need it the most, are the ones that are going to suffer the most."

The council will look at various options for the planned schemes, which could include selling the sites or progressing them with other providers. But councillors were warned that the less risk the council took on in each development, in handing over to a private developer, the less control they would have about how the final projects turned out.

Councillor Howard Williams (Independent Spelthorne Group, Staines) questioned how the council should approach the issue. He said: "I don't think the residents of Staines would be very impressed if we sold the Oast House site to a developer only on the basis that they can shove 15-storey buildings in there and we walk away with the least cost to ourselves."

Councillors heard it was unlikely to be a "one size fits all" approach, and each site would be looked at in detail, to have options presented to the committee and to council. But the authority's chief accountant, Paul Taylor, gave a stark warning about the rising interest rates on government-backed loans, as well as the lower heights of projects going through the planning stages that he said had wiped £70million of revenue out. He told councillors: "We must take action now to protect the council."

Related reports:

Spelthorne's thorny property problems spelt out

Hosts of Ukrainian refugees appreciated

On the Independence Day of Ukraine – 24th August, **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** offered a huge thank you to more than 60 hosts who have welcomed Ukrainian people into their homes as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and asks anyone who is interested in finding out more about becoming a sponsor to get in touch.

The council, in partnership with **Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network** (EERN), has facilitated more than 120 placements in the borough as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme since it began last February.

Galyna, who arrived in the UK from Ukraine in May 2022, said: "When I first arrived in the UK I felt really lost, as I didn't know anybody or how things worked. I was supported by the Homes from Ukraine team at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council soon after arrival."

Amanda, one of the borough's valued hosts, said: "Back in March 2022, we signed up for the Homes for Ukraine scheme and had no idea what we had signed up for, it just seemed like the right thing to do!

"We now have our second set of lovely guests, we know a lot more about the history of Eastern Europe, have negotiated government systems and learnt much about ourselves. We have no regrets and feel very proud to be a part of Homes for Ukraine."

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said: "I have been overwhelmed by the kindness that people in Epsom & Ewell have shown in welcoming displaced people from Ukraine to our borough.

"Hosts have helped families feel at home in a new place where they may not speak the language, showing them around and helping them feel safe.

"I'd like to say thank you to the many people who have supported efforts to help people in Ukraine, by taking part in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, raising money, or donating money or goods."

Nicky Marshall, Host Supervisor for EERN, said: "95% of placements work very well. Guest(s) become like members of the family.

"Hosts join the scheme for many different reasons and have fed back that it is enriching and enlightening, giving both parties the chance to learn about a different culture (and sometimes experience a different cuisine!)."

EERN works with Epsom & Ewell Council to support Ukrainians in our borough, providing regular English lessons, helping families navigate school requirements, and aiding people in finding employment, for example putting them in touch with the Epsom & Ewell Employment Hub. EERN also run social events that help Ukrainian guests feel more at home.

Anyone who is interested in finding out about the Homes for Ukraine scheme should email homesforukraine@epsom-ewell.gov.uk.



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Anyone in the UK who has not been matched with a Ukrainian person or family can record their interest in the scheme, as long as:

- they can offer a spare room or home for at least 6 months
- · if not a British citizen, they have leave to remain in the UK for at least 6 months
- they do not have a criminal record.

'Thank you' payments: hosts have the option to receive a monthly payment of £350 for up to 12 months, paid in arrears, for as long as they are hosting their guests and the accommodation provided is of a suitable standard. Hosts are eligible for the first monthly payment once the accommodation they are providing has been checked.

Find out more and register interest here: https://www.gov.uk/register-interest-homes-ukraine

Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network is a registered charity, part of Good Company (Surrey). They operate under a service level agreement with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, supporting Ukrainian families in the borough.

Their website is: https://epsomrefugeenetwork.org/ukraine-support

Greener solution for white goods?

When a housing association tenancy comes to an end what happens to the fridges, washing machines and carpets? Invariably, they are removed before the new tenants move in. Is this not a waste and could they not stay in place, if in good condition, for the benefit of the new tenants moving in? Especially those who are struggling financially?

This was the subject of a question posed to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council by Cllr **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford). In answer Cllr **Clive Woodbridge** (RA Ewell Village Ward and Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee) stated "I have asked that officers write to all our local Housing Associations to ask them not to remove good quality and clean carpets/flooring during the voids process and for these then to be gifted to the incoming tenant. Hopefully, this will help our residents further during what is a very challenging time"

At the Full Council meeting of 25th July Cllr **Julie Morris** (LibDem College) asked Cllr Woodbridge to accept that the reasons for this included "the need to re-use these goods and not be so much of a disposable society". Cllr Woodbridge agreed saying "each case had to be treated on its own". He added "the Council were working much more closely with **Town and Country Housing** that had taken over from Rosebery Housing Association."

Little plots of Council land for housing?

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Strategy and Resources Committee decided Thursday 13th July to submit two Council owned sites for housing. The Draft Local Plan sets out the framework for local development including meeting housing targets. Proposals to release green belt land for development were met with strong local opposition and a brake on the Plan's adoption.

Council officers were tasked with seeking additional brownfield sites suitable for housing, including land owned by the Council itself.

The Council owns 37% of the Longmead and 35% of the Kiln Lane industrial estates. However, the grant of long leases to various businesses means that none of its land can be made available in the Local Plan timescale within 2040.

Consideration was given to the Council owned Cox Lane Community building and car park but a doctor's surgery and nursery need medium term certainty for their future with the surgery's lease expiring just before the plan period ending 2040..

Two small plots of Council owned land were stated to be suitable to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority, (the Council itself) for consideration for inclusion in the Local Plan. They are a small 0.08 ha site (a former Scout's Hut) on Wesley Close / Scotts Farm Road and Richard's Field Car Park accessed off Chessington Road, offering approximately 35 parking spaces of which about 14 are reserved as resident permit spaces.

Cllr Graham Jones MBE (RA Cuddington Ward) noted the Wesley Close site had not been submitted before as it was too small.

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"What had changed?" An officer explained the proposal was "directly on the back of members request to find more brownfield sites to meet housing targets. The site had been looked at again and it could achieve 5 dwellings which is the threshold for a call for sites".

Cllr Jones asked the same question in relation to the Richards Field car park and Cllr Dallen suggested that there maybe a way of building residences while keeping parking provision.

The meeting agreed to the submission of the two sites for consideration to be included in a revised draft Local Plan.

In a lengthy explanation officers reported that the legal and cost obstacles to pursuing compulsory purchase orders to acquire land for housing development are too high. Thus, exercising such powers was not recommended.

Related Reports:

Motion to pause Local Plan process

Public meeting on Local Plan dominated by greenbelters.

Planning or pantomime? Councillors press pause on Plan.

Housing rights enhanced by neighbours from hell?

The experiences of Epsom and Ewell's nearby Surrey Borough Councils help to enhance public understanding of the rights and responsibilities of local residents and our Council. This report of **Chris Caulfield** from our BBC LDRS partner is the subject of today's editorial.

A woman whose mental health suffered at the hands of "intimidating" anti-social neighbours was refused higher priority status by a council's housing team, a local government watchdog said.

The woman, named only as Ms B, raised the complaint about how **Reigate and Banstead Borough Council** dealt with her housing application – even after she provided medical evidence from her doctor about the impact of her neighbours' actions.

It would also emerge that the council's housing team failed to pass her case on to its medical advisor - despite claiming the decision was based on their feedback.

Ms B first contacted the council in 2021 seeking a larger housing association home and was placed in band c – medium priority. In June 2022, she then submitted a letter from her GP saying she "would greatly benefit from a house move away from disruptive neighbours" and that the "situation had affected her mental health and she needed high intensity psychotherapy".

On September 26, 2022, she then submitted a fitness for work note from her GP, documents relating to her therapy, three police incident letters, and a letter from social prescribing. On 26 October 2022, the council reviewed her status and ruled she "did not have any medical priority and sent her a decision by email".

The council said this was based on advice from its own medical adviser – however it later admitted that it "erroneously said the case was passed to the Medical Adviser when it was not".

The decision read: "Following careful assessment, we have concluded that your application should not be awarded any additional priority on medical grounds."

Finally on November 23, 2022, on advice from her ward councillor, Ms B sent a statement explaining the anti-social behaviour and harassment experienced. It detailed incidents from 2017 but said problems escalated in December 2021, "mainly involving damage to her car but also some intimidating behaviour".

Eventually the council reviewed her case and, at the beginning of January 2023, increased her priority to band b – and backdated it to November 23 the 2022.

The ombudsman found the council to be at fault, with the authority now agreeing to backdate her new priority to September 262022, as well as pay her £150 for her time and trouble – and to improve its procedures for the future.

The council now has three months to review its housing allocation review procedures to ensure decisions are accurate, contain reasons, and provide a right of review where appropriate. They must also remind staff that they should make further enquiries

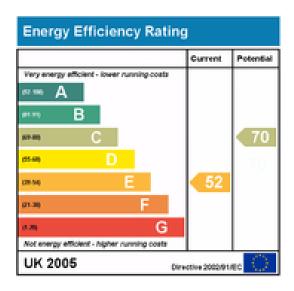
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when they receive information about changes in circumstance.

A spokesperson for Reigate and Banstead Borough Council said: "We accept the Ombudsman's findings and we have worked with them to resolve the complaint and have fully complied with the mutually agreed actions."

Epsom and Ewell tenants paying for energy inefficient homes?

55% of inspected rented homes in **Epsom and Ewell** are below Grade C in Energy Performance ratings. Landlords are required to obtain Energy Performance Certificates for their rentals. To obtain a certificate an independent expert must inspect the property. In an analysis of inspections across the country between 2018 and 2022 Epsom and Ewell's figures are consistent with the country average. 5% of those below grade C are not going to be able to rise to a C grade in the future because of structural limitations.



The Government has plans to make a C grade mandatory for all rental properties from 2025. The most energy efficient homes are graded A and the worse G. Those tenants living in sub C standard homes are paying more for their heating due to poor insulation. Insulation was the most frequently recommended improvement measure for private rental properties, making up 35% of all recommendations. On average tenants could save one third on their fuel bills if landlords brought their properties up to the C grade.

Inspections for EPCs involve an assessment that looks at heating, windows and doors, insulation and other structural factors, estimating how much it will cost to heat and light the property, what its carbon dioxide emissions are likely to be and how to improve the rating.

Jonathan Winston, occupier support manager at the **Carbon Trust** said "14% of UK emissions arise from residences, homes. That means the reductions that need to be made there are very significant in order for the UK to meet its legally binding net zero target by 2050. The emissions are quite difficult to tackle, particularly around heating. There's a major need to decarbonize our heating sources."

Chris Norris, Director of policy at the **National Residential Landlords Association** said "I think there's an awful lot of misunderstanding and uncertainty about what landlords need to do in terms of energy efficiency.

"But the future proposals are to get to a C or above, because the Government have got this Net Zero target for 2050. The problem is, they consulted on those new rules about three years ago, they closed that consultation two years ago in January 2021, and they've never actually confirmed what new rules will be.

"You've got lots of landlords that are actually quite open to making changes to their properties, or making decisions at least about



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what they need to do, but they really don't know what path to take and they can't commit to those spending decisions until we find out exactly what the Government wants to do."

He added: "At the moment the Government is doing very little to support landlords to make these changes. They've not even given us the target or the deadline for what we've got to do."

Rachelle Earwaker, senior economist at the **Joseph Rowntree Foundation**, said: "Living in a home with a poor EPC rating has a range of impacts on the tenants. Homes are colder, often damper. They are much more expensive to heat. At the moment in the energy crisis, that has had a massive impact.

"What our research has shown is that 35% of low income private renters across the UK said they couldn't afford to keep their homes warm even before the recent winter that we've just had, and we know that a quarter were in arrears with the energy bills in October and November, again before the winter."

You can check any property's EPC status on this Government link.

Related Reports:

Cllr Gulland: Insulate & Generate - two key aspects to include in the Local Plan for Epsom & Ewell

Is this Epsom Couple getting their heating for free?