

West Essex Young People and Domestic Violence Service
Based at Harlow Foyer
Occasio House
Playhouse Square
Harlow
CM20 1AP

FAO: Mr R Wilson
Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)
Epping Forest District Council

8th January 2015
Your ref: RW/ASch

Dear Mr Wilson

Re: Consultation on review of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme

East Thames Group, West Essex Young People and Domestic Violence Service manage a young parents' supported housing scheme in Ongar, namely Railway Meadow.

We are writing to you today to put forward our comments on the draft revised Housing Allocations scheme. Referring to the proposed changes to Residency Criteria, paragraph 14.3, we feel some young people requiring our service from the Epping Forest District may be affected by these changes:

It is being proposed that any applicant who has lived in the Epping Forest District for less than five continuous years immediately prior to their date of registration will not qualify for inclusion on the Council's Housing Register unless they fall into one of the exception categories listed from a) to g), or under paragraphs 14.4 or 14.5.

Railway Meadow provide a short term supported housing service to young parents aged between 16 and 22 years, although some discretion can be given to the upper age limit depending on exceptional/personal circumstances. Epping Forest District Council currently share nomination rights with two other councils for our service, and when nominating referrals to us the nominee must meet the council's residency criteria in order for EFDC to offer resettlement by way of move on accommodation. This is offered after the young person has completed a period of tenancy at Railway Meadow, and has learnt and developed the necessary independent living skills to hold their own tenancy.

We would like to express concern that if the residency criteria changes to five years, this will exclude a lot of young people from being able to use our service. Due to their young ages, it is out of their control or power to decide where they reside in most cases; with the exception of care leavers for whom these changes will not affect, when they approach EFDC at such a young age, many may not have the required five year's residency if their parents or carers have not chosen to live in the district for the whole of that period.

Example:

Miss X is aged 19 and has a six month old child. Miss X has been asked to leave her family home by her parents, she has support needs and requires supported housing in order to learn the necessary life skills in order to be able to hold her own tenancy in the community. She approaches EFDC but does not meet the five years residency criteria, as her parents only moved in to the area three years ago when she was aged sixteen years old. At the age of sixteen, Miss X was unable to make a choice about which area she wanted to live in as was too young to hold a tenancy herself.

We are proposing that the council consider making an exception to the five year residency criteria for those young people that move into supported housing. We suggest that if a young person requiring supported housing is aged under 23 years old, the residency criteria should not apply to them. At the age of 23, a young person could have effectively had control over their last 5 years of residency, as would have been 18 years old at the start of that period and able to live alone and make a choice about where they live.

I trust that these comments will be considered by the Council's Housing Portfolio Holder as per your letter dated 1st December 2014. I would be grateful for an update following this and to be advised on the outcome of the Cabinet's decision on approval of the proposed changes following their meeting on 9th March 2015.

Yours sincerely

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