

Temporary Amendment to the Housing Allocation Scheme 2020

1. Introduction

Using discretion in the Housing Allocation Scheme (see Appendix 1), the council is suspending the current approach to the removal of employment points for housing applicants, in view of the economic impact of the pandemic.

2. Temporary change to the removal of employment points

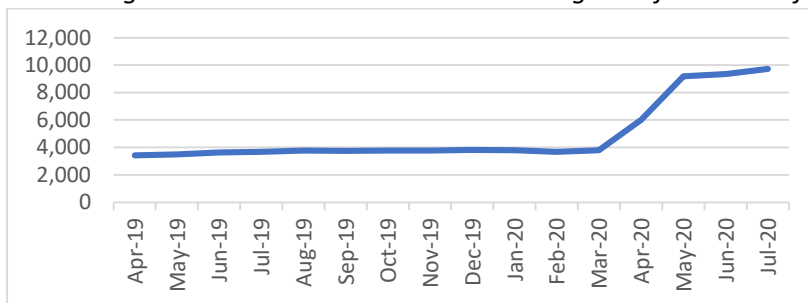
As set out in 2.6.8 – 2.6.16 of the Scheme, some applicants are awarded additional points for being in employment or if they are homeless and working with the council’s employment service to find work. Points are awarded subject to meeting a criteria.

- 2.1 As also set out in the Scheme (2.6.11), these employment point are withdrawn if the applicant / their partner loses their job and doesn’t get further employment, permanent or temporary, for at least 16 hours per week, within 28 days.
- 2.2 For a period of six months, starting from 5th October 2020, employment points will not be removed if the applicant or their partner has:
 - lost their employment due to the impact of Covid-19 *and*
 - registers and works continuously with the council’s employment service (the Westminster Employment Service¹) to find work.
- 2.3 Employment points will also be retained if an applicant no longer meets the criteria for them as they are now working less than the required minimum of 16 hours each week, due to the impact of Covid-19.
- 2.4 The onus is on the applicant to provide evidence of the reasons for their loss of employment or reduced hours, such as a signed letter on company headed paper, or an appropriate email.
- 2.5 This temporary approach will be reviewed after six months.

3. Reason for the change

Although the long term economic impact of Covid-19 is unknown, Westminster has seen rises in claims for out of work benefits and claimants now make up 5.4% of population compared with 2% at July 2019. The Furlough Scheme is also due to end in October 2020 so redundancies are expected.

Figure 1: Westminster residents claiming out of work benefits



¹ www.westminster.gov.uk/employment

- 3.1 The Furlough Scheme is being replaced by a new Job Support Scheme, where Government will support the wages of people in work in certain circumstances - where they are kept in employment but have reduced hours – as an alternative to them being made redundant².
- 3.2 The council recognises that removing employment points to those that have lost their jobs due to Covid-19 or have reduced hours is unfair, given the unprecedented situation, and that some households in these circumstances will be close to being rehoused and removing their employment points would result in them waiting longer for social housing.

4. Equalities implications

Given the fast moving situation it has not been possible to do an equalities impact assessment on the temporary change and data is not yet available on the groups most likely to lose their jobs or have reduced hours due to the impact of Covid-19.

- 4.1 Equalities impacts have been considered as far as is currently possible and Appendix 2 shows the groups, with protected characteristics under equality legislation, that are more likely to have employment points. In summary these are: those in the 25 – 64 age group; Black households; households with children; those that do not need any form of adapted home and men.

5. Communications implications

Applicants will be made aware of this temporary change through the website and in any individual communications they have with officers in the Housing Solutions Service.

Temporary approach to employment points

In light of the public health emergency arising from the outbreak of COVID-19, and in order to ensure our approach to lettings is as fair as possible to those negatively impacted, I Neil Wightman, the Director of Housing resolve to exercise the discretion given within the Allocation Scheme to temporarily suspend the removal of employment points due to Covid-19, in the circumstances described above for a period of six months from 5th October 2020.



Signed:

Name: Neil Wightman (Director of Housing)

Date: 12/10/20

² www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-of-the-exchequer-rishi-sunak-on-the-winter-economy-plan

Appendix 1: The Housing Allocation Scheme and discretion

Extract from the Housing Allocation Scheme 2020:

www.westminster.gov.uk/housing-strategies#allocations-scheme

1.18 From time to time the scheme refers to the existence of a discretion or general discretion. Except when otherwise provided, this refers to a discretion to be exercised by the Director of Housing or by a duly delegated person(s) and shall allow the person exercising the decision to take account of all circumstances considered appropriate and/or relevant by that person including (when considered appropriate and relevant) the demand for and supply of accommodation and the general housing circumstances within the City of Westminster.

1.19 The Director of Housing has discretion to give such additional preference as the Director considers appropriate to any applicant who, in the opinion of the Director, has pressing housing needs.

Appendix 2 – Housing applicants with employment points: equalities analysis

Percentages are of those eligible.

