Haringey Local Medical Committee and Community Housing Services

Assessment of Medical Information for Housing Priority

Many patients approach their GP’s to ask them to provide information about their medical conditions in the hope that this can be used by the Council to increase their priority to be offered social housing. This leaflet explains the way that the Council and local GP’s work together on this issue.

Background

Access to social housing in the borough is via the Council’s Housing Register. The Housing Register operates as a 'banding' system in which applicants are placed in a priority band to reflect their housing need. Within each band, applicants are put in date order, using what is known as the ‘effective date’: the date the applicant was placed into the band.

In common with most other London boroughs the demand for social housing in Haringey is much higher than will ever be met and a large number of the people on the Housing Register will never have sufficient priority to be offered a Council or Housing Association home. There are about 800 properties that become available each year; about half of these are one-bedroom homes. There are not enough family sized homes available to meet the demand and even families that have priority for these homes will have to wait many years before being offered a permanent home.

About 80% of the social housing in Haringey is in the East of the borough in Tottenham and is largely flats and maisonettes.

Medical problems and housing priority

Many people suffer from medical problems that they would like the Council to take into account when deciding their priority for social housing. It is important to be aware that the Council will only consider awarding medical priority where the medical condition is made worse by their housing or where a move to a different property would have a positive impact on their medical condition.

Assessing whether priority should apply

It is for the Council to decide whether medical priority should apply. Haringey GPs have worked with Housing Services to agree a medical assessment framework which will help manage patients’ expectations and reduce the need to ask GPs to provide supporting letters and complete medical information forms.
If you are on the Housing Register and would like the Council to consider an award of medical priority, you will initially be required to have a telephone conversation with a member of the Council’s Housing Assessment Team. The Team can be contacted, by telephone, on 0208 489 1000.

The Housing Assessment Officer will make an initial assessment of the likelihood of medical priority being awarded. They will do this by asking you a series of questions about the condition, such as when it was diagnosed, what medication is being prescribed and whether hospital treatment has been required. Only if the assessment indicates that there may be a need to assess the case for medical priority will you be asked to obtain a copy of your ‘electronic medical notes’ from your surgery. The surgery can charge for this and you will be responsible for this cost.*

Even though you can still provide the Council with a copy of your electronic medical notes – even when the Housing Assessment Officer has told you that this will not result in you being awarded any extra priority – the Council will make it very clear to you that this is likely to be a waste of time and effort.

When the Council receives the electronic medical notes, it will arrange for these to be assessed by an Independent Medical Advisor. This will normally be within 28 days of the Council receiving the notes. If the Independent Medical Advisor needs more information, s/he will contact your GP directly. Please be assured that confidentiality is paramount at all times and that, if information is sent electronically, this information will be sent via a secure National Health Service network.

The outcome of any medical assessment will be communicated to you, in writing, by the Housing Assessment Team.

**You do not need to ask your GP or any other medical professional to provide you with a letter. If information from your GP or other professional is needed, an officer from the Council will write to them and, if appropriate, pay a fee.**

What we ask of you as the patient

As GPs are extremely busy and it is in everyone’s best interests that they spend as much time as possible attending to their sick patients, we ask that you:

1. Think carefully about whether or not your current housing conditions are, in fact, making your medical condition worse.
2. Contact the Housing Assessment Team to find out (through an initial assessment) if you are likely to be awarded extra priority for housing.
3. Consider whether or not it is really worth you asking your surgery for a copy of your electronic medical notes if the Housing Assessment Team has told you your medical condition is unlikely to attract extra priority.
4. Avoid making a special appointment with a GP just to request the electronic medical notes, because the receptionist can deal with this for you and tell you when to return to collect the document.
5. Ensure that, at the time you request the electronic medical notes, you are in a position to pay the amount that the surgery charges for them.

*In exceptional circumstances where it is shown that this will cause financial hardship, the Council may reimburse up to £10 of this charge. If this applies to you, please contact the Housing Assessment Team on 0208 489 1000.*