

The allocation of council housing

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Preface (1983)

I became interested in allocations policy when I worked, while at college, as a volunteer in housing aid. I later became Lettings Officer for Hartlepool DC, where I was responsible for devising and implementing a new scheme for the allocation of council housing, and subsequently undertook research on the subject as part of an M.Sc. degree at the London School of Economics. I have since taught aspects of allocations policy to a variety of workers involved in the field. This study was undertaken while working at Trent Polytechnic, and the survey was financed by a grant from the Polytechnic's Research Fund. I wish to make it clear, though, that any views contained in it are my own, and do not represent the policy of the Polytechnic. In addition, although Shelter has kindly agreed to give the work a wider circulation, the research was conducted independently of Shelter and the views expressed in it are not necessarily shared by them. I should like to thank those housing officers who took the trouble to provide me with extensive documentation. I have attempted throughout to respect material given in confidence and have not attributed sources when personal comments have been made. Thanks are also due to Della Nevitt, who supervised my M.Sc. dissertation on 'The Allocation of Council Housing', and to Dorothy Larkin, who helped compile the statistics. Jerry Smith, Dave Alexander, Ken Pritchard, Sheila Spencer, Steve Hilditch and Derek Fox made comments on the first draft, and particular thanks are due to Roger Matthews, of Shelter, for comments, editorial suggestions, help and information.

Introduction

The two central issues of housing policy are the questions of **access** and **deprivation**. This report is concerned with an important aspect of access - the allocation of council housing - which also has major implications for those who are deprived. Council housing is not, and has never been, housing for the poor, but for many of them it is the only real prospect of adequate housing. The purpose of this report, which is based on a national survey of allocations policies, is to describe and analyse the ways in which local authority housing is let. The process seems, at first sight, straightforward enough: you register on the waiting list, the council awards points based on your needs, and when you have more points than anyone else, you are offered a house. The reality is often quite different. Your application to go on the list may be refused; even if the application is accepted, you may be told you are not eligible for rehousing. Some councils do use a points system to assess need, but others use quite different allocations schemes. Other people who want homes, like homeless people, or medical cases - may be taken outside the regular scheme. There will be different queues for different areas and types of houses. Finally, the actual offer of a property will be made by a housing officer who may well depart from the official scheme.

There is no national scheme for allocations, but local authorities are supposed to follow certain common principles in deciding their priorities. The main statutory provision is contained in s.113 of the 1957 Housing Act, which directs them to

"secure that in the selection of their tenants a reasonable preference is given to persons who are occupying insanitary or overcrowded houses, have large families or are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions, and to persons towards whom they are subject to a duty under ... the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act."

This does not establish any clear duties: the term 'reasonable preference' is vague, and there is no adequate method of enforcement. It can only be read as a statement of general intention. In Scotland, the Tenants' Rights etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 makes more rigorous restrictions, forbidding much discrimination on the grounds of age, residence or income, but, as a recent Shelter report shows, it has not been universally respected (1). Each local authority makes its own decisions about how to deal with needs in its area and who should be housed, and no two schemes are the same. To some extent, this reflects important differences in the problems faced by local authorities. Firstly, they have very different proportions of council housing in their area. In places where a high proportion of houses are council owned, there are more likely to be large urban estates, and a higher number of vacancies to deal with the problems that present themselves. Councils with small housing stocks may have an inadequate number of houses to let. In Carrick, for example, an average of 15 homeless families apply each fortnight for 6 lettings. Secondly, a different range of housing may be available. Some urban authorities have a large number of high rise flats, which are now widely considered unsuitable both for families with children and for elderly people. Geography also plays its part: in the Rhondda, for example, because council housing was built on the hills around the centre, there is virtually no accommodation suitable for disabled or infirm elderly people. Rural authorities in particular tend to have limited numbers of properties scattered over a wide area. There may be just a few council houses in a village, and in general, as one housing officer wrote,

"... residents in one village will rarely accept housing in another village, no matter how close it may be. We do sometimes offer accommodation in another group to relieve pressure on a neighbouring waiting list, but such offers are frequently refused. This is not held against the applicant ... (In areas) where the stock, turnover and list are small, the wait is determined by when a tenant vacates rather

than how many applicants are waiting. Thus a new applicant could be housed within weeks if he applied at the right time, or have months to wait."

Waiting times on different lists in this council's area vary from 3 months to two and a half years. A council may well be administering several distinct lists simultaneously: Cunninghame, e.g., has 17 lists, and Harrogate has 24. Thirdly, the population of an area, and the condition of the housing stock, mean that the demand for council housing varies, and it is not surprising to find that authorities with large proportions of elderly people and relatively good housing (like authorities on the South Coast) order their priorities differently from those in declining urban areas.

At the same time, councils face a number of common problems. There is a shortage of houses to let, largely as a result of the decline in housebuilding. A further problem is that the supply of housing does not match the demand. Most councils have a predominance of two- and three bedroomed houses, which are generally considered most suitable for small- and medium- sized families. Housing for single people and for large families is in short supply, and there is in addition a concentration of four-bedroom houses in certain older estates. Despite the fall in available lettings, increasing numbers of properties have become 'difficult to let' - both because applicants at the top of the list have realised they have a choice, and because many of the properties available are unsuitable for the people waiting for them. Local authorities are often forced, in letting property, to depart from their official policy. In a study of local authority policies in the Midlands, Niner showed that some families would generally be rehoused before others because of the type of housing available. She argued that

"the question of who is allocated a council house from the waiting list is not solely, or even chiefly, dependent on the allocation policy in use." (2)

The shortage of housing for single people and large families means that, if these people can be housed at all, they are likely to wait for a longer period of time than others. This raises major questions about our investment in housing. It does not, however, mean that allocations policies are unimportant. They can have a major impact on the ways in which needs in an area are expressed; and, from the viewpoint of individuals, it also matters precisely who gets housed, how and where. Many families currently on council lists have no home of their own, and have to live with relatives or friends. A limited prospect of rehousing is a major contributory factor to stress: relationships tend to break down, and the family is subsequently evicted. This has become the most common cause of homelessness. But many allocations policies are not based in need, and give low priority to the problems which lead to homelessness. The increase in the problem in recent years is a reflection, not only of the shortage of adequate housing for large numbers of people, but of the failure of allocations policy to deal with pressing demands.

The process of allocations can put certain people at a disadvantage. They find it more difficult than other applicants to get council housing and are likely to be given inferior accommodation when they are housed. This report tries to put allocations policies in both a personal and a social context.

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Publication

Local authorities are now required by law to publish their allocations schemes. A summary of the rules must be given without charge to any member of the public who asks for one, and a set of the full rules must be available for a 'reasonable fee'. It seems that this law has

been widely ignored. I asked 457 authorities for copies of their scheme, enclosing a post-paid envelope; only 343 (75.1%) replied, and of those 16 failed to provide details. Some who did give details Or their scheme did so by letter, as no material had been published. Only eight authorities mentioned a charge. The quality of the published material is also a matter for concern. In 22 cases the information given was inadequate to determine even what type of scheme was being used. In many other schemes, the information was cursory, and it was difficult to establish from them how the scheme would work. This made precise quantification of the survey results impossible. Many, if not most, of the leaflets are badly written. A large proportion use a 'question and answer' format, in the arguable belief that this makes matters clearer. Stirling, for example, asks:

"Q.20. If my application is designated 'nonactive' what are my prospects for housing?"

A.20. The policy has been designed to allow a differentiation between housing need and housing want ... "

Leaflets are commonly riddled with jargon and complexities - words like 'residing', 'underoccupation', 'accommodation' and 'amenities' are rife - and with legalese. Bristol opens its 'Synopsis of conditions and rules of acceptance of applications' by the enlightening statement that

"s1. The Applicant shall be the head of the family, and may be the Husband, widower, widow or unmarried person (or a person separated from his or her spouse) who wishes to set up a home ..."

and continues in the same vein. In addition, a number of authorities have apparently found it necessary to include a threat of action to be taken in the event that false information is given. Thirdly, the content of publications is often unclear or incomplete. One senior housing officer suggested that this might be because

"in many instances Local Authorities don't know how dwellings are allocated. It took me quite a while to find out in my own Local Authority."

Few schemes indicate the limits of officer discretion, and some are explicit only in their refusal to give details. North Cornwall, for example, informs applicants that allocations are determined by committee, and states: "Because of the confidential nature of house allocation, e.g. discussion of personal details relating to individual cases, the allocation committees are NOT open to the public and press." There may be a case for restricting information in this way, but it is questionable whether it conforms to the legal requirements.

Types of scheme

Conventionally, allocations policies have been classified as 'date-order', 'points', 'merit' or 'group' schemes (3). A 'date order' scheme is one in which applicants are taken in order of the date of application. In a 'points' scheme, certain factors are weighted against others. A 'merit' scheme implies that cases are taken 'on their merits' - it is doubtful that this can be taken as a 'scheme' at all. And a 'group' scheme determines priorities between categories of applicant. In practice, this classification may be gravely misleading. In the first place, all schemes include a number of categories - usually including at least clearance, homeless families and medical cases which are dealt with by different criteria than other applicants. In a sense, therefore, all schemes are 'group' schemes. A number of schemes explicitly assess priority differently for different categories of applicant. It is not unusual, for example, for old people and families - who are often seeking different types of accommodation - to be assessed on different criteria. This may be done by awarding different points (as is done, for example, in Croydon or Spelthorne) or by treating groups by entirely different criteria. Sevenoaks takes most people through a points scheme but

elderly people are assessed by merit. Roxburgh defines sixteen categories of need group: single people are treated in date order, families in 'unsatisfactory housing' by a points scheme, and single parents by unspecified means. Secondly, a number of schemes have a combination of elements. A 'date-order' scheme may be altered by the priority given to some groups over others (e.g. Wigan, York). Exeter takes applicants with a minimum number of points in date order. A scheme dependent on 'merit' may be guided by the use of points (Broadland, West Lindsay) or by date order (Gloucester, Poole). And although a 'group' scheme may define broad principles it does not determine in itself who should receive priority within a group. This may be decided in date order (Ipswich, Carlisle), by points (Waltham Forest, Nairn), or by merit (which applies generally to special groups like medical or social cases). It should be clear that a simple division into points schemes, date order schemes, and so on, does not work. To take a particularly complex example, Aberdeen tries to give equal numbers of houses to 'unsuitably housed' applicants and those 'with no separate home'. Priorities within these groups are determined by a points scheme. Then the top 100 cases in each of these groups are 'frozen' in date order. This simply defies classification. Even if it were possible to put schemes neatly into simple, discrete categories, there are important differences within these categories. 216 schemes (over two thirds) involved an assessment of points in some way. But all points schemes are not alike: they take different conditions into account, and give different weights to the factors which they have in common. This will be discussed in more detail later. Similarly, a date-order scheme may not be a straightforward queue: there may be an initial selection of people in 'need' (North Hertfordshire, Hertsmere), and applications may be weighted according to circumstances (Coventry, Norwich). It follows that a different test should be applied. If we want to know who gets housed and who does not, we need to ask:

- which categories of applicant gain access to the waiting list?
- how are priorities assessed between groups?
- how are priorities assessed within groups? and
- how is it decided who is to get a particular house?

Access to the housing list

Access to the housing list may be restricted in several ways. The most common is to find some form of residential qualification, usually that a person must 'live or work' in the authority's area. The reason for this is, apparently, to favour established residents over newcomers - a practice frequently condemned by central government (4). About a third of authorities have minimum periods of residence or employment - Southend, e.g., asks for 2 years' residence or 4 years' employment, and Slough looks for 5 years of the last 6. About half all authorities also require applicants to remain on the list for some time before they can be considered for rehousing (5). (These restrictions are not now permitted in Scotland: 6). Some authorities have minimum waiting periods only for the more desirable properties: Enfield has 6 months, Sandwell 5 years. These restrictions are used to prevent people in serious need from being housed too quickly relative to others proceeding through 'normal channels'. Plymouth retain a discretion to ignore their minimum waiting period, which is 2 years: a recognition that, having created rules which prevent some people in need from being rehoused, they must also break the rules for them. The main criticism of restrictions of this kind is that they penalise those who are most mobile - often the most vulnerable groups. They also have the effect of confining applicants to one area - leading to a position where some councils are overwhelmed with problems, and are forced to build at great expense, when the demand could be met in part by adjacent authorities with a much bigger supply of houses. Other restrictions are also common. Some authorities bar young single

people: East Yorkshire and South Cambridgeshire, e.g., require single applicants to be over 30. Owner-occupiers may be disadvantaged: Cynon Valley consider them only as special cases, as does Sunderland if the value of their property is over £15000. In other authorities, owner-occupiers may not be registered (Aberconwy and Eastleigh bar those who have owned a house in the last two years), though this may be subject to age (55 in Fenland or 60 in Gosport) or to the sale of the house to the council (Argyll and Bute, Lewisham). These policies may require reform in view of the growth of owner-occupation among people with low incomes. Restrictions on income are rare, although they do occur: Croydon has a scale of maximum incomes, and Maidenhead bars applicants with over £6250 p.a. (the average male wage at this time was over £7500: 7). Many councils insist on a clean rent book (e.g. in Gedling or Hinckley and Bosworth, for 6 months past). Suffolk Coastal bars any two families from being rehoused from the same dwelling within three years of each other. Corby refuses applications from cohabitants. Hamilton reserves the right to refuse applications when 'expedient'. A number of councils operate 'deferred lists' so that an applicant is not necessarily considered for rehousing even when registered. Some authorities refuse to register applicants who are not in 'need' (e.g. Bournemouth, Reigate and Wanstead): in Thanet, an applicant must have a minimum number of points before the application can be put on the list. On the face of it this seems fairer; it has the advantage of not deluding people as to their prospects of rehousing. The problem is that it ignores an individual's own assessment of his need, and in particular that it puts applicants at a disadvantage who are apparently housed satisfactorily but who are about to move because of insecurity or stress. It also makes it difficult to use the waiting list as an indicator of demand. It is desirable, on these grounds, not to limit access to the waiting list if it can be avoided.

Priority between groups

Councils may mean two things by the term 'group'. The first is that certain groups are given a degree of priority over others. This may be because of special needs - like homelessness or medical reasons - or particular circumstances requiring special consideration, like discharged servicemen, people in tied accommodation, local authority staff, or key workers. Angus refer to special provision for gypsies, battered wives and discharged psychiatric patients. A number of authorities rank groups in a clear order of priority - the conventional 'group scheme'; others guarantee a proportion of lettings to various groups (a 'quota' scheme). All schemes require that some categories are defined. The problem with a 'group' scheme - that is, a scheme which relies only on this broad categorisation of applicants - is that it can only give priority for the most important problem. Carlisle, for example, reserve some housing for overcrowded householders, and some for householders in sub-standard properties; but a person who is overcrowded in substandard accommodation receives no special consideration. Similarly, an applicant in Wigan who has self-contained housing with a 'deficiency' of two bedrooms will receive priority over someone who has a 'deficiency' of only one bedroom, but who shares accommodation and has no bath or hot water. Group schemes are defensible only in those areas where there is a plentiful supply of housing, and no finer measure needs to be applied. Areas of this sort are few. The second reason for placing applicants in groups is that people need different sizes and types of house, and old people living alone are not usually seen as being in competition with young families with children. The effect of these groupings is to define who the applicant is competing with. There may be, in practice, several lists which operate side by side. Councils have limited power to affect their relative priority; the speed of rehousing depends on the type of housing available. But councils can alter the balance between groups. In trying to make the best use of their stock, councils have generally avoided offering people housing with spare

bedrooms. (Council tenants are far less likely than people in the private market to have a spare bedroom - in itself a major cause of inferior standards in council accommodation.) It is common practice at the moment to restrict single people to one-room accommodation. A council can redefine the sizes of households which may occupy houses. Single people could, for example, share housing (as they do in the private market), though an arrangement of this kind, which is used in Stevenage and West Lothian, is quite exceptional in council housing. (Edinburgh gives extra points for those wishing to share; Sheffield lets to students sharing. Arrangements of this sort are more common in housing associations.) Another way to change the balance is to move people between different sizes of house in order to create vacancies of the right kind - the 'management transfer'. The family which is moving house will not see the move in the same light as a housing authority. People want to transfer to better houses, to houses nearer work, or shops, or relatives; they see their claim as valid in itself. Management transfers are difficult to explain, and lead to unequal treatment between transfer applicants. It is difficult to incorporate transfers of this kind explicitly in an allocations scheme, and the published rules do not, in general, seem to allow for transfers on this basis. The Lettings Officer of one English authority, with whom I discussed this point, assured me that in these cases the published scheme would be modified by 'management practice'.

Priority within groups

Within groups, priorities are generally determined in one of three ways: by date-order, merit or points. The method of determining priority in date-order schemes (66 schemes, or 20% of the total) is largely self-explanatory. (There are modifications of the basic pattern. Some authorities, e.g. Breckland, Newark, create an artificial 'date of application' - adding a number of years or months to the original date - by taking into account certain factors of need. In principle this is equivalent to a points scheme). Wakefield rehuses old people in order of age, rather than date order. Motherwell accepts the date of marriage instead of the date of application, which of course discriminates against those who are not married. Merit schemes are also fairly self-explanatory: there are no hard rules, although of the 30 merit schemes, 7 used points for guidance, and 6 used date order. (These figures contrast with the findings of the Housing Services Advisory Group, which thought that merit schemes had largely ceased to operate: 8.) Allocations are generally decided by officers or committees of councillors. Points schemes work by taking into account a number of factors, giving them a certain weight, and adding them together to decide who should be housed first. They make it possible to consider date-order or 'merits' as only one or two factors out of many which might be considered. It is on points schemes that I intend to concentrate in this section. The Cullingworth report described points schemes as "excellent in concept but difficult to devise with fairness" (9). The problem has been to decide which factors should be included, which weights are appropriate, and how combinations of factors compare. Is it worse, for example, to live in a damp house with no bathroom or to have to share a modernised bedsit with a young child?

Three examples

The following cases, which are fictional, may help to show how this problem is dealt with in practice (10).

1. Mark, 21, and Jean, 20, are living with Jean's parents in a three-bedroomed council house. They sleep in one bedroom with their child, aged 1. Jean's parents sleep in the largest bedroom, and their son Tim, aged 16, has the third, smallest, bedroom. Both Mark

and Jean are unemployed. There is friction between Mark and Jean's parents, and there have been many arguments. Mark and Jean have been on the housing list for two years, and have lived in the area since birth.

2. Sandeep, aged 30, and Manda, aged 28, have bought their own two-bedroomed house, through a private arrangement. They have one daughter, aged 6. Sandeep works in a local factory and earns a low wage (£85 p.w.). The house has no bathroom, no hot water, and an outside toilet. They cannot afford repairs, even with an improvement grant, and the house is in a dilapidated state. There are large patches of damp on the wall in the living room, and mould in the bedroom. They have been on the housing list for three years, and have lived in the area for four.

3. Edward, 25, and Diane, 23, rent a modern two bedroomed flat, on the first floor of a small block, from a private landlord. They have a son, aged 4. The flat is in good order, centrally heated with all modern facilities. They would like to move because they do not feel the flat is suitable for a young child. Edward earns an average wage of £150 p.w.. They applied at a time when financially they were less well off, and have not been able to save a deposit for a house. They have been on the waiting list for four years, and have lived in the area all their lives.

I have selected three large urban authorities to illustrate the differences in policy: Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. These authorities take different factors into account, and give different weight to the problems.

<i>Liverpool</i>			
Mark and Jean: Family			3
Subtenant			3
Shared living room			3
Overcrowding			3
Total			12
Position			First
Sandeep and Manda: Family			3
Condition			2
No bathroom			1
Total			6
Position			Second
Edward and Diane:	Family		3
	Total		3
	Position		Third
<i>Birmingham</i>			
Mark and Jean:	Bedroom shortage		150
	Shared accommodation		150
	Waiting time		90
	Total		390
	Position		Second

Sandeep and Manda:	No bathroom	50
	Waiting time	30
	Total	80
	Position	Third
Edward and Diane:	First floor flat	250
	Waiting time	200
	Total	450
	Position	First
<i>Manchester</i>		
Mark and Jean:	Overcrowding	10
	Shared amenities	5
	Time in need	35
	Total	50
	Position	Third
Sandeep and Manda:	Condition	9
	Amenities	4
	Time in need	45
	Total	58
	Position	First
Edward and Diane:	Children living at a height	4
	Time in need	50
	Total	54
	Position	Second

It is difficult, if not impossible, to explain the difference in terms of local needs. There are significant differences between areas - Liverpool, for example, has a high number of properties and of vacancies, which should mitigate the worst effects of an otherwise limited allocations policy - but this does not explain the inclusion of different factors, or the weight given to them. They seem to reflect, rather, a difference in attitudes towards different kinds of housing need. Points schemes are a method of achieving consistency while taking different factors into account, but they are not in themselves a guarantee of fairness.

Measures of need

The section which follows is more technical. It describes in detail the range of factors taken into account in points schemes (the weight given to factors, though important, means very little if it is not seen in the context of the whole scheme). The figures are taken from 196 of the 216 schemes which used points; the details in the remaining 20 were too thin to use.

Overcrowding. All the points schemes took overcrowding into account in some way. The most common method of measuring overcrowding is through a standard of 'bedroom deficiency', which allows a bedroom to each couple, two males, two females, or two children under a certain age (usually 10). Some authorities allow a bedroom for people who are ill, and North Shropshire allows 8 separate rooms for people who are mentally retarded; some authorities stipulate that those sharing should be of the same generation. Only 7 authorities have a standard sufficiently generous to allow each single adult his or her own

room, a standard now enjoyed by 95% of the households in Great Britain (11). Walsall is unique in allowing each child its own room. A number of other authorities have substantially more illiberal approaches: Macclesfield and New Forest, for example, accept that three young children can share one room, and Moray that a single parent should share with a child under 5. Relatively few authorities, 25, take the size of rooms into account in addition to the number of bedrooms, and only 59 give points to those lacking 8 living room. The other most common basis for a measure of overcrowding is the statutory standard, introduced in 1935 and currently used in this way by 41 authorities. It is highly unsatisfactory for this purpose: it suggests, for example, that a family with six children may not be overcrowded in a two bedroomed house.

Lack of amenities. Conditions vary in different areas, and same variation in factors could be expected. North Norfolk and East Hertfordshire, for example, give points for 'earth closets', which do not exist in profusion in Bournemouth or Birmingham. But much of the variation is inexplicable. 126 authorities gave points for those with no inside w.c., 59 for those with no w.c. at all; 114 for no hot water, 83 for no internal water supply; 95 for no bathroom, 90 for no bath, but only 29 for no washbasin; 77 for no kitchen, 41 for no sink, and 38 for no cooking facilities. 16 gave points for the absence of adequate heating, 10 for artificial lighting, 20 for electricity and 4 for gas. Hastings gave points for an inadequate number of electric sockets, Aberconwy for the absence of a fuel store, and Carrick for both of these problems. 23 authorities gave points for inadequate drying space, and 14 for food storage. There are grounds on which to question both the complexity of these distinctions and the choice of inclusions. Only 2% of the households in Great Britain now have no bath, and only 2% have an outside toilet. Hardly any have no flush toilet (12). Clearly, applicants for council housing tend to represent a more deprived section of the community; In private rented accommodation, which has a higher proportion of problems than any other form of tenure, 11% have no bath and 9% have an outside toilet (13). But the modern amenities unavailable to people nowadays are more commonly refrigerators (7% of households do not have one), washing machines (24%), and telephones (28%) (14) a problem not so much of housing as of low income.

Shared amenities. Points were given for shared w.c.'s in 139 cases; kitchens, in 113, cookers in 23, sinks in 15; bathrooms in 83, baths in 38 and basins in 9. 18 authorities gave points for a shared water supply, and 12 for a shared hot water supply, which seems to be taking fine distinctions to an absurd degree. Once again, this shows a limited relationship to contemporary problems. 2% of households in Britain share baths, and 1% share w.c.s (15). The proportions are higher in the private rented sector (18% and 19% respectively) but this represents a high number of single sharers, who are not necessarily badly housed. The main problem is not that some people share facilities, but that sharing is one of the difficulties faced by people with no home of their own.

Tenure. Since living with friends or relatives has become the main single source of homelessness, it may be expected to be given substantial priority, which it often does not receive as such. Only 62 authorities take insecurity of tenure into account. 55 give points for accommodation that is not self-contained (which includes others besides those with no home of their own). The most common allowance was for those with a shared living room (101 authorities). In general, points for shared facilities often stand for concealed households. Rather fewer authorities consider insecurity of tenure in its wider sense. 37 took into account the special needs of 'tied' (service) tenants, but hardly any considered the insecurity of tenants with resident landlords (Hartlepool is an exception). A few authorities

(e.g. Scunthorpe, Kirkcaldy) give points to furnished tenancies, which largely ceased to be relevant to security of tenure in 1974.

Homelessness. Although local authorities have a duty to homeless families, a number consider this duty relative to others. 10 authorities give points for homeless families, and no fewer than 97 authorities give points for families who are separated - who are homeless under the 1977 Act, but who on the evidence of these schemes do not seem to be treated as such. (In Test Valley, officers recommended that points should be given for separated families; this was rejected by the councillors, who believed it was open to manipulation by dishonest applicants.) Oxford gives points to homeless people in temporary accommodation, which suggests that they may have some time to wait while their cases are weighed against others. 17 councils give points for those with Court Orders against them, presumably to show that homeless people are not being treated as exceptional cases. Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Stewartry give extra points for people who do not qualify for rehousing under the Act, which is important, though they should in any case have priority on the grounds of immediate need. Apparently in Newcastle the difficulty of investigating the circumstances of someone without an address makes the award of points infrequent.

Structural condition. The condition of the property used to be widely ignored; it has now become a major element in points schemes, although even where condition is taken into account it may be on fairly restricted criteria. The grounds on which points are given are often unspecified (71 authorities gave no clear information) but a number of others do give details: damp is taken account of in 30 authorities, disrepair in 34, natural lighting in 25, ventilation in 34, and inadequate drainage in 21. 19 authorities gave points for unfit housing. The relatively low priority often given to condition is a reflection of past policies, which relied on clearance and improvement to deal with the problem. This may have undesirable effects, by discriminating against the poorest people in the private sector.

Medical factors. These may be taken into account at an earlier stage, before establishing priority within groups, or as part of a points scheme, which makes it possible to give some weight to medical circumstances with less than absolute priority. 168 schemes (86%) give points for medical needs. Points are usually awarded by a senior medical officer (e.g. the District Community Physician) on a recommendation from G.P.'s. North Norfolk, exceptionally, accepts the recommendations of health visitors, who are well placed to assess the relationship between housing and medical problems. Points may be limited by the extent to which people stand to benefit from rehousing (58 authorities specify this) but most provisions for medical points do not explicitly relate health to housing problems. Gravesham gives points to people with disablement pensions - thereby (probably unwittingly) giving priority to those disabled through industrial accidents or war, as opposed to those disabled for other reasons, because these are the essential grounds on which disablement pensions are given. Wear Valley gives points for 'war disability or chronic illness'. 4 authorities give extra points for TB cases, which was more appropriate twenty years ago. Afan also gives priority for silicosis and pneumoconiosis. Mental illness is nowhere explicitly mentioned.

Social factors. Social factors are in general taken insufficiently into account. Neighbour disputes, depression, the fear that a child may otherwise have to be received into care, are instances where it may be appropriate to retain discretionary points. But because these are difficult to measure, it is difficult to ensure the element of consistency essential to fairness. Only 40 authorities give points for social need, but 56 others have discretionary points which can presumably be used for this purpose, and others will take these as special cases

outside the scheme. Some authorities delegate the award of points to Social Services Departments, or at least consider 'recommendations' from them, which is appropriate because many of the areas in which the use of discretion is necessary are areas which social workers are trained to assess. Others rely on councillors or housing managers. Exceptionally, cases of this kind may be specified. 6 authorities take financial hardship into account, though financial benefits are often available to help with problems. Norwich gives priority for cot death. Bath gives points for 'incompatibility with neighbours or relatives'. Edinburgh and Roxburgh give points for families with members attending special schools, and Roxburgh gives points for foster children.

Elderly people. 35 local authorities give extra points for advanced age. This may compensate for the disadvantage of those who come to apply late in life, but it may also discriminate against younger single people. It is illegal in Scotland. Old people who under-occupy may have particular need for smaller accommodation, and this may release larger accommodation for families. Points are given for this in 52 authorities. 4 authorities give points if the garden is too large. 12 authorities give points for problems with stairs, and 10 give points for old people who occupy upstairs flats. 4 authorities give points for the support of elderly people, and Kirklees gives points to those who have an elderly relative in their home.

Children. 37 authorities give points for families with children living in upstairs flats, and four for children living in any kind of flat. 3 authorities give points for lack of space for a pram, and 13 for no play space. Preseli, uniquely, gives extra points to single parents on the ground that their access to alternative accommodation is likely to be limited.

Employment needs. 14 authorities give points for those who have difficulties in travelling to work. Edinburgh gives points to shift workers, and Brighton to shift@ workers in bedsits.

Unsuitable accommodation. 16 authorities allowed points for accommodation that is in general unsuitable for applicants, and 12 give points for an unsuitable internal arrangement of the property. 57 gave points for caravan dwellers, five for people with basement accommodation.

15 authorities took into account general problems stemming from the location of the applicant's present house; 13 gave points for those who wanted to move near to relatives, 4 gave points for people who had no access to public transport in isolated locations.

5 authorities considered problems arising from the environment of their present accommodation.

Factors other than need

Date-order. Date - order features in 84% of schemes. It is usually credited as a number of points given for each year on the waiting list (136 authorities), though 'three more authorities vary these points according to the needs of the applicant. 4 authorities give points for waiting time as a percentage, which gives greater weight to those in need. (Cullingworth thought that this was "unworkable" (16); I've done it, and it isn't.) Basildon, remarkably, gives points for each week on the waiting list, which puts substantial emphasis on date order.

Residence. Points for residence, often additional to points for waiting time, occur in 113 authorities. (They are - nominally - illegal in Scotland.) 10 of these use residence only as a

balancing factor, to determine priority between otherwise equivalent cases. The emphasis on residence is often increased by an initial selection of applicants through a residential qualification, and extra points for waiting time. The Wrekin gives points for remaining at one address - penalising those who are mobile because of insecurity. 18 other authorities give extra points for residence in a particular part of their district. 19 authorities also give points to servicemen who live elsewhere and who would otherwise be substantially disadvantaged on discharge.

Family. 45 authorities give points for family size. It is difficult to see why: different sizes of family are in competition for different sizes of accommodation, and the effect in practice is to give priority to a family with three children over a family with two children for three bedroomed house. The provision may in some cases discriminate against single parents, and against single people in competition with others. Canterbury, for reasons which are not immediately clear, gives no points for children but does give points to women who are pregnant.

3 authorities give extra points for engaged couples, and 2 give points to couples who are married. This may discriminate against single parents and unmarried couples, and gives priority to couples over single people for one-bedroomed accommodation.

Other factors. 9 authorities give points for having a job. Kingston on Thames gives points for service to the borough. Carmarthen gives points for cleanliness, and Great Yarmouth deducts points for dirtiness, which is not quite the same thing. Great Yarmouth also makes deductions for irregular rent payments or persistent arrears, and Plymouth gives no points to those in arrears of rent. Ryedale gives points for suitability as a tenant, and Rossendale withholds points for poor standards of housekeeping or behaviour.

Selection for tenancies

Once an applicant has come to "the top of the list", it does not follow that he or she will be given the next house that becomes available. A number of other considerations come into play. It may be necessary for the application to be approved for rehousing by a committee of councillors. In some places, this is a formality which only delays the process of rehousing; on the other hand, it may be possible for councillors or officers to object to individual allocations, or to veto certain people @s prospective tenants. Merionnydd retain a discretion to reduce points. In South Cambridgeshire, councillors may put alternative nominations for a tenancy. Cannock Chase "reserve" the grant of a tenancy if it would be "against the best interests of the housing administration in the district".

There is also the question of consumer choice. Although some authorities give both a choice and a good idea of what effect that choice is likely @o have on the prospects of rehousing (Glasgow and Chester are exemplary), preferences are not usually allowed for explicitly in the published schemes. Choice is, generally, limited. Applicants are not offered more than one property at a time; even if enough houses of the right type and in the right area were available at the same time, to hold them vacant while one applicant decided between them would cause delay, at a cost both to the authority and to others who would have to wait longer. Many applicants have their choice restricted further by penalties for refusing offers. I had been under the impression that three offers were given in most cases, but, although some authorities do mention three offers (e.g. Coventry, Ipswich), they are relatively unusual. To take a few illustrative examples, East Staffordshire makes one offer only; Llanelli makes no further offer for one year if an applicant refuses without good cause; Arfon deduct points; South Bedfordshire defer an application for 6 months on the first

refusal, and take the applicant off the list after the second . The HSAG took the view that these restrictions were largely unreasonable (17). In practice, housing managers do have to take account of consumer choice. A council cannot afford to have a house standing empty while it offers it around, and failure to take preferences into account would make it more difficult to find a tenant who will accept it. Applicants are aware that it is very difficult to move once they have a tenancy, and they are not prepared to accept the worst council housing. The numbers of houses classified as ' difficult to let' has grown exponentially in recent years - a reflection as much on allocations policies as on the quality of the housing. The reaction of many tenants is to be insulted by an offer they consider to be below their standard: officers are encouraged to avoid the situation where offence may be given.

This is related to a third element in selection for tenancies - the practice of grading applicants. This is said to have declined, though as it was not done publicly in the first place, it is difficult to know how true this is. The advice of the most authoritative text used at present by housing managers, Macey and Baker, is that "the personal suitability of the applicant and his wife are a guide to the type of dwelling to be offered" (18). This may be due in part to the belief that the tenants with the highest standards are most likely to maintain the most desirable stock in the best condition. More important, though, is the housing manager's anticipation of the attitude of tenants and applicants themselves, both because tenants will resist any attempt to house 'unsuitable' applicants near them, and because applicants are not prepared to be housed near certain 'types' of people. Grading has been criticised for a number of reasons. SNAP, for example, hold that it shows "an overriding concern with the allocation of housing stock rather than with meeting need" (19); Southwark CDP, that it "removes from the poorer families what element of choice they have" (20); and Griffiths, that it leads to a concentration of deprived families (21) . A further point is that it precludes openness in allocations: in the words of a housing assistant, "You can't tell someone they're dirty" (22). The HSAG report argues that grading "cannot be justified", though they are, inconsistently, prepared to accept a veto of "undesirable" tenants (22) . Grading is not usually done explicitly. It is said to have become less common in recent years (23), but it is difficult to show , without a point of comparison, how true this is. Argyll and Bute say that the "suitability of the applicant" will be considered, and Leeds consider, in a report to the housing committee, the desirability of some assessment of standards:

"some latitude must be allowed in this respect, in order that an applicant may be provided with a home in which he is likely to settle happily and in which the personal circumstances of his family will show an improvement. "

Mentions of cleanliness or housekeeping standards are relatively uncommon, and even where they occur it is not explained that this will affect the quality of house offered. In Bradford, the function of the housing investigator does include a check "that the dwelling is clean and free from vermin, ensuring no unwelcome ' visitors' are taken into a council dwelling" and the District Housing Managers have an "overriding discretion" on allocations. In general, though, grading is a matter of management practice rather than official policy, and it is often not known to councillors. In effect, there is no guarantee in practice that a scheme will work as it is published.

Allocations policies: an overview

Local authorities generally attempt to ensure that the scheme which they use is appropriate to local conditions, and inevitably, councillors and officers working in a particular area have a better claim to understand the needs of their areas than I can make on the basis of a

limited amount of published material. There is an association between the type of scheme used and the type of area (25):

No. of dwellings	% of points schemes	% of date order	% of merit schemes	% of mixed schemes
0 - 4999	56	17	11	17
5000 - 9999	59	17	9	16
10000 - 19999	45	37	4 -	13
20000 and over	42	42	3	14

Points schemes and merit schemes seemed to be used more in small authorities; date order schemes in large ones. The use of 'merit' schemes in rural authorities is understandable. There may be, perhaps, two people in a village waiting for one house which will become available once in twenty years. An extensive examination of all the facts of the case, including factors which cannot objectively be measured, may well be appropriate. The problem with this approach is that it is open to patronage, and even to improper consideration; it cannot be seen to be fair. A good case can be made in these circumstances for a merit scheme backed up by a points scheme; but, as the Scottish HAC have argued, "schemes of this sort in effect become merit schemes ... we do not regard them as meeting our principles of consistency and impartiality" (26). Allocation on 'merit' is a breach of the obligation to publish; schemes of this sort cannot be seen to be fair, and they should therefore be discontinued. The use of date-order in large authorities is more surprising. Areas like Nottingham, Leicester or Dundee, which have high proportions of council housing, rely on a high number of vacancies to deal with outstanding problems. The basic arguments in favour of date-order schemes are that it is easy to administer, and generally accepted as fair. But the belief that the schemes are accepted by the public is not borne out by research done by the Welsh Consumer Council (27). Although most people accept the principle of 'first come first served', it is inherent in a date order scheme that cases in urgent need must be taken outside the scheme - and are therefore believed to be jumping the queue. Secondly, the fairness of a scheme will be judged as much by its practice, and particularly by the process of selection of tenants, as by the way it looks on paper. Date order schemes tend to put at a disadvantage those least able to wait - often those most vulnerable, and most in need. The arguments used to support date-order would apply equally to selection by ballot. This would have at least the advantage of giving those most vulnerable a chance of immediate housing which they do not have at present. Because date-order schemes are simple, they are defensible in those areas which have little need or demand - it makes little sense to make an elaborate assessment of need to decide whether a person is to be housed in eight or ten weeks. It is often favoured in rural authorities for this reason: Ogwyr has recently abandoned its points scheme for a date order scheme because there was no major demand left to deal with. But it is equally inappropriate to the circumstances of large authorities which have multiple and complex demands placed on them and it has really no place in this context. The failure to take need into account can only exacerbate stress, leading to a breakdown of relationships and an increase of homelessness. The essential advantage of points schemes, in comparison, is that they can take the relevant circumstances fully into account: they can be impartial, open and balanced. There are two main arguments against them. The first is that they are not always devised with sufficient care to produce the result that was originally intended. I think it is fair to say that I have not seen a single points scheme with which I could not find fault - including the one I devised myself - but this does not invalidate the principle, and the more glaring problems could be

avoided. The second is, as a report to Leeds argues, that they can result "in a loss of flexibility vital in a sensitive allocation policy". The argument against this position is the same as that against merit schemes: all schemes must retain some element of discretion, but "flexibility" implies a use of personal judgement, and the greater the element of discretion, the less a scheme may be seen to be fair. A points scheme is the policy of choice for all circumstances in which a considered discrimination between individual cases is required. The problem with points schemes rests in their design. It is striking that less than half the schemes make any allowance for insecurity of tenure, social factors or problems in coping with property, and less than a tenth consider heating, environmental problems, or problems in obtaining alternatives in the private market. And these figures refer only to the most detailed and explicit schemes. This should be contrasted with figures from the General Household Survey (28), which analyse why people wished to move house. The main reasons were as follows:

Environment	23%
Neighbourhood	8%
Neighbours	15%
Inadequate amenities	10%
Poor state of repair/unfit	7%
Stairs	6%
Accommodation too large	12%
Ill health/ old age	12%
Accommodation too small	20%
Lack of garden/garden too small	7%
Costs	8%
Different type of housing wanted	13%
Other housing reasons	8%
Wish to move nearer job	3%
Other job/study reasons	12%
Marriage	2%
Wish to move near friends or relatives	10%
Other personal reasons (bereavement, breakup of marriage, etc.)	7%
Landlords want tenants to move	3%

Only five of these reasons - inadequate amenities, poor state of repair, accommodation too large or too small, and ill health - are taken into account by more than a quarter of the authorities which use points schemes. It is understandable that local councils should concentrate, in their allocations policy, on those factors which imply the greatest deprivation. But the differences in criteria reveal an alarming gulf between social expectations and the policies which councils pursue. Even if councils were to reform their schemes, it is uncertain whether this would have a clear, direct effect on allocations in practice. A policy which fails to consider the process of tenant selection is unlikely to meet

its objectives. This process cannot be controlled unless it is made explicit and subject to scrutiny and review. It follows that an essential part of any reform must be the establishment of rules to determine the criteria by which applicants are matched to houses.

Allocation and discrimination

The effects of allocations schemes are both personal and social. For individuals, they determine who gets housed, and who does not. But they can also create disadvantages for larger groups of people. For examples, I intend to consider briefly the effects of the process of allocations on two disadvantaged groups: racial minorities, and single parents. These groups are not the only categories of applicant who are disadvantaged - single people, childless families, travellers and people in marital breakdowns are also treated less favourably than other applicants - nor are their problems necessarily representative of the problems experienced by these other groups. They provide, simply, an illustration of the way in which policy and practice can combine, in a number of small ways, to discriminate against certain people - often those most in need.

Racial minorities

Disadvantage may arise through conscious discrimination, but perhaps more important is the way in which "the public sector is ... prone to 'accidental' discrimination arising from the way it tackles priorities, formulates its rules, or generally presents itself to the-public." (29) The Runnymede Trust, in 1975, showed that there was a lower proportion of coloured tenants in GLC housing than in the population at large; that more than half of those who were housed were living in high-density pre-war flats; and that they were concentrated in the least desirable estates (30).

The reasons for this have been analysed thoroughly in a PEP report (31). They argue that disadvantage can arise from the process of allocation in a number of ways. The first involves the criteria for rehousing. Because black households are often concentrated in certain parts of the private rented sector - particularly, in private rented housing, and low-income owner-occupation - a low priority given to this sort of tenant can work against racial minorities. Residential qualifications can also work against immigrants, for obvious reasons. Secondly, the grading of tenants provides an avenue for discrimination by visitors; and, it has been argued, it can also cause an unintentional disadvantage when the standards of other ethnic groups are looked at from the viewpoint of a middle-class British visitor (32). A GLC report (33) found that the quality of the house offered varied with the verbal ability of immigrants, which may happen for the same reason. Thirdly, the range of property available to ethnic minorities may be limited. The size of house needed may not be available; large families, who constitute a higher proportion of some ethnic groups than of the population as a whole, may face some delay before they are housed. The preference of minority groups has tended to be to remain in central areas, which limits the available accommodation. Policies for dispersal have also reduced the range of property, which leads to delay (34). Fourthly, it is worth noting the importance of information. The Cullingworth report noted a mistaken belief among immigrants that they were not eligible to apply (35)@ which is, I believe, still prevalent (it is created by the conditions of entry imposed by the Home Office); and there is still a shortage of information in the language of immigrants . Taken separately, none of these factors is obviously of major significance; but when the effects are added together, the disadvantages are substantial. Minority groups are less likely to be allocated council housing, and are liable to get inferior accommodation when they do. The facts have been rediscovered by subsequent survey@ (36); any scandal rests not so much in the details reported as in the failure of local authorities to respond to conditions that have been well known for a reasonably long time.

Single parents

Like racial minorities, single parents may be consciously discriminated against. The Cullingworth report noted that "unmarried mothers, cohabitees, 'dirty' families and transients tended to be grouped together as undesirable" (37). This was substantiated in evidence to the Finer Committee by the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, and by the Institute of Housing Managers (38). The Housing Services Advisory Group suggest that 'all fatherless families tend to be to some extent stigmatised and hence given the most stigmatised lettings' (39). However, disadvantage may also arise in unconscious ways. The Finer Committee was critical of the criteria used for rehousing.

"Points systems and residential qualifications were both said (in the evidence) to be particularly disadvantageous to one-parent families, who do not always score the missing parent's points and who often- have to move across local authority boundaries in search of accommodation. " (40)

The problem is described in more detail by the Catholic Housing Aid Society:

"Although points are granted for overcrowding, no account is taken of room size and frequently for children under the age of one year. ... No points are given for harassment or poor physical conditions. Moreover, something like one in two of the families moved at least once every two years. London waiting lists ... operate against the family who is forced to move home." (41)

There has been some improvement since this was written in 1974, but the survey indicates that the criticisms are largely still valid today, and a government circular on the issue (DoE 78/77) has been less than spectacularly effective. Lastly, single parents tend to live in the worst and least secure accommodation. Homelessness is a particular problem; one third of homeless families, in 1978, had single parents (42), and the number is on the increase. The outcome of this insecurity is that single parents are often allocated inferior housing they are not in a position to refuse.

The social consequences of allocations policy

Allocations policies may also have a social impact. It is clear that they will have an effect on the council sector. It has been argued that the existence of 'difficult to let' estates is attributable to allocations policies: that "ghettoes developed because councils, when allocating accommodation, graded families according to their deserts instead of their needs" (43). Gray similarly believes that "ghetto estates may be viewed as a form of punishment, a device for disciplining and the social control of tenants" (44). In 1977, for example, Birmingham decided to concentrate difficult tenants on the ground that it made them easier to supervise and less of a burden to others (45). But in general, grading is not done for reasons of social control. The problems of depressed estates are found equally in the private as in the public sector - areas which are undesirable because of their reputation, poor physical conditions, and poor maintenance. In both sectors, some people are able to exercise a choice while others cannot. Undesirable housing is accepted only by those who are most vulnerable, desperate, indifferent or those least familiar with the system. Housing departments have bent to pressure from applicants and tenants. (This interpretation is supported by a study of Killingworth New Town published in 1980: 46). It emerged from a survey done for the Cullingworth report that grading was more likely to be done where the stock was of varying quality (47) - an indication that grading is as much a response to the problems of allocation as a cause of them. A reform of allocations policy may have some effect on this process. Other responses - like the Priority Estates Projects (48) - have concentrated on the environmental factors which made the housing undesirable. Although neither is adequate to prevent stratification, both may help to break the vicious cycle within

a limited geographical area. By contrast with the attention paid to the public sector, relatively little attention has been given to the effect of allocations policy on the private sector. The process of allocation creates vacancies in the private sector. This will not always be to the advantage of the deprived - the idea that benefits 'filter down' afterwards is misleading, because the housing released is usually occupied at some stage by newly formed households. The rehousing of elderly owner-occupiers is most likely to improve the prospects of buyers on middle incomes. The rehousing of tenants often leads to the sale of property to low-income owner-occupiers. There are other effects, because the decision to house some groups rather than others directly determines those who remain. The failure to rehouse young single people has been particularly important. Many older, unsatisfactory houses have been owned by private landlords. They have had the basic alternatives of selling to owner occupiers on low incomes - people like racial minorities, who have been disadvantaged in respect of other alternatives - or letting to single people. In competition with three or four young single people, a family has no chance of obtaining private rented accommodation if they could afford to pay the same as the young people do collectively, they could afford to buy the house. The private rented sector has effectively died as a form of housing for families. But the demand for private renting from young single people is in part a function of the non-availability of council housing. Often they occupy, as a result, ordinary housing which, despite its limitations, would be more satisfactory for families on low incomes than some of the properties councils offer. High-rise and deck-access properties, conversely, may be better for young people sharing than for families, when isolation is less likely to be a problem, play facilities unimportant, location presents less of an obstacle, and the relative cheapness of the property has much to commend it. But very few councils would allocate a three bedroomed property to three single sharers. A further problem arises because people on low incomes in the private sector may effectively be debarred from council housing. Although the cheapest private housing is generally of poor quality, this has not been given priority in allocation except through clearance programmes. Improvement programmes offer only limited help; even at the most generous levels of subsidy, a number of landlords and owner-occupiers simply cannot afford for major works to be done. Those who live in this type of accommodation tend to include old people, single sharers, and immigrants, because these are the people disadvantaged in access to council housing. The public sector has, in large part, shaped the problems of the private sector.

Summary

1. Local authority allocations policies determine access to adequate housing, not only for the million people on waiting lists, but also in effect for the third of all households who ultimately occupy council houses. Allocations policies have not been seen as a national issue, because of the differences between local areas, but certain essential principles should be more universally accepted. The most important of these is that, in places where there is a shortage of council housing, allocations should be based on an assessment of need. In many places, particularly in those authorities which select tenants in date order, this does not happen.

2. The attempts of central government to establish basic standards have been widely ignored by local authorities. Guidance in central government reports (the Cullingworth report, which favoured allocation on the basis of need, and the Housing Services Advisory Group report, which has pleaded for an full account of needs and preferences to be taken) has been rejected. Circulars (notably on residential qualifications and on one-parent families) have been disregarded. And legal restraints have proved ineffective to a disturbingly high degree.

3. The schemes which local authorities use are complex. Important aspects may be closed to public scrutiny, and published information is often incomprehensible. The schemes are very varied, but despite the differences it is arguable how far many of them are related to local needs. The factors taken into account often seem arbitrary, and it is far from clear how standard practices have been adapted to meet local circumstances and problems. Moreover, the practice of allocations may depart from published guidelines in important aspects.

4. It is not possible, in a study of this kind, to say how any particular authority should conduct its affairs, but some general indications can be given. Local councils should remove restrictions on access to the housing list. A clear priority should be given to people in housing need, and selection should not take into account respectability or suitability as a tenant. The selection should, in all cases where there is a shortage, be made through the use of a points scheme, taking into account not only traditional factors like overcrowding, basic amenities, structural condition and medical problems, but also social and environmental factors, and ways in which applicants are disadvantaged in comparison to other householders.

5. Local authorities also need to consider the implications of policy for the problems of housing in the district as a whole, both in dealing with their own stock and in its effect on the private sector.

6. The basic problem of allocations policy is a problem of shortage, primarily for those to whom access to adequate housing in the private market is denied. The power of local authorities to alter this is limited; they can ease the problem, by greater flexibility in the use of their housing, but the underlying pressures can only be relieved by an extensive programme of building and improvement which depends for its initiation on central government.

Notes

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