Advice for providers of supported accommodation

**Proposed process for administering housing benefit (HB) claim for occupants of Supported Exempt Accommodation (SEA)**

Lewisham has one of the largest provisions of Supported Housing in London and is proud of the quality of support available for its residents. The Council invests around £6.5 million a year into commissioned services totalling over 1,000 bedspaces and works closely with 3 recognised SEA providers with over 500 bedspaces.

We are committed to ensuring our residents receive value for money and access to high quality support in Lewisham – We monitor all the providers and their individual services using our Quality Framework which includes the criteria for providers to both adhere and aspire to.

Approach to SEA providers

Lewisham has seen new providers trying to enter the sector and deliver SEA.

The Council has found it difficult when accrediting providers to deliver SEA and will now undertake a different approach when dealing with potential SEA providers including requiring them to;

* complete a detailed questionnaire
* submit documents in support of the questionnaire (eg. property lease, referrals, support plans, risk assessments and contact logs)
* provide evidence that potential tenants need SEA
* allow Council staff to visit properties to speak to staff and tenants (if already placed there)

The emerging findings from the work being carried out by the Council is that many new providers are:

* housing tenants who have only general needs and therefore have no need for the support and services associated with SEA
* either not providing support services or not providing a good standard of support services or accommodation
* moving people into accommodation with no local connection to fill bed spaces adding more pressure for statutory and 3rd sector organisations in the borough

**Our new process**

To regulate SEA and ensure our residents are safeguarded against poor provision from SEA providers, the Council is introducing a new process which will ensure that only those qualified and able to deliver high quality provision are financially supported to do so by the Council.

What to do if you are an organisation seeking accreditation to provide SEA in Lewisham?

The first stage for potential SEA providers is to [**complete our questionnaire**](https://lewisham.gov.uk/-/media/benefits/exempt-provider-quality-framework-self-assessment-200324.ashx?la=en).

We also need our [**Quality Framework assessment form completed**](https://lewisham.gov.uk/-/media/benefits/exempt-provider-quality-framework-self-assessment-200324.ashx?la=en)- this details the standards we expect new providers to meet.

**Any potential providers should not move any occupants into accommodation until we have made a decision on your accreditation.**

If a new provider meets our standards and is accredited within Lewisham, a secondary test is applied to potential occupants.

This test ensures that any enhanced HB applications are from tenants in need of SEA, namely that they have support needs beyond general and require a specific level of care, support and supervision. This would normally be evidenced through the form of an assessment from a recognised housing, health or social welfare organisation and the completion of the form supporting a referral to a SEA provider. [**Here is the Support Assessment Referral Form (SARF)**](https://lewisham.gov.uk/-/media/benefits/blank-sarf-form-exempt-providers-0324.ashx?la=en).

Providers who seek to enter the sector within Lewisham without adhering to this process will not be considered for accreditation as a SEA provider and any tenants in their properties will not be awarded HB. They will be required to apply for support with their housing costs from Jobcentre+.

**Organisations already providing SEA in Lewisham**

The Members Bill seeks to re-define the standards for SEA provision nationally. Lewisham will review all providers, their accommodation and tenants to ensure the quality of services and properties are in line with our Quality Framework (the above Quality Assessment form). We will work with current providers to make improvements where necessary. Where we have concerns about the property / provision of services and we are unable to work with providers to make the necessary improvements, we will not accept or process any further applications for enhanced HB from any new tenants.

Our new arrangements are as shown in the link to our full process below.

* [**full supported process**](https://lewisham.gov.uk/-/media/benefits/new-process-web-update-april-2024.ashx?la=en)

**Appeals**

We will make decisions based on the information and evidence provided and also from what is seen when audits of the service are carried out. All of the decisions will be determined from this overall collection of evidence and comparing it against the Quality Framework which lays out Lewisham’s expectations of any organisation delivering SEA in the borough. If a negative decision is received but disputed, there is the option to submit an appeal but this has to be completed by the tenant and **NOT** the SEA provider.

For more details, **please contact the SEA Team**.