

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 4 March 2013

Portfolio: Health and Housing
Subject: **Housing Allocations Policy**
Report of: Director of Community
Strategy/Policy: Housing Strategy/Allocations Policy

Corporate Objective: A Balanced Housing Market

Purpose:

This report seeks the Executive's approval to adopt and implement a new Allocations Policy.

Executive summary:

A Member Officer Working Group was established to consider the key changes required to the Allocations Policy to reflect legislative changes introduced by the Localism Act 2011. These changes included allowing Councils to develop their own local connection criteria and to give additional weighting within Allocation schemes to those applicants who have served in the Armed Forces.

The draft policy was considered by the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel prior to being issued for public consultation. This report summarises the work of the Member Officer Working Group, considers issues raised through the formal consultation and outlines a timeframe for implementation.

Recommendation:

- (a) That the Executive approves the proposed new Allocations Policy is adopted for implementation from 1st May 2013
- (b) That the existing waiting list is frozen and all housing applications be reviewed and re-prioritised
- (c) That the Member Working group reconvene in Nov 2013 to evaluate the impact of the changes and report their findings to the Health & Housing Panel

Reason:

To ensure that the Allocations Policy reflects changes introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and the impact welfare reform will have on affordable housing.

Cost of proposals:

The cost can be met from existing budgets.

Appendix A: [Allocations Policy](#)

Background papers: Health & Housing PDR Panel Report March 2012:
Consultation on the New Allocations Code of Guidance

Health & Housing PDR Panel Report July 2012: Review of the
Council's Nominations Policy

Health & Housing PDR Panel Report November 2012:
Nomination Policy Review

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Executive Briefing Paper

Date: 4 March 2013

Subject: Housing Allocations Policy

Briefing by: Director of Community

Portfolio: Health and Housing

INTRODUCTION

1. The Council has a statutory duty to have an Allocations Policy in place for the allocation of Council Housing and other social housing in the Borough owned by Registered Providers (RP's)
2. The Localism Act 2011 introduced significant amendments to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 - the legislation governing social housing allocation, which has necessitated a full review of the Allocations Policy,
3. The Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel (HHPDRP) agreed that a Member Officer Working Group should be established to look in detail at the changes required to be made to the Allocations Policy in light of the national guidance and to ensure that the best use is made of the affordable housing in the Borough.
4. The Working Group considered the following key issues with the proposed responses agreed at the HHPDRP in November 2012:-

Key Questions	Proposed Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How should applications from existing social housing tenants be processed and prioritised?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existing tenants looking to downsize will be given additional priority under the new Allocations Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What 'eligibility criteria' need to be in place to ensure social housing is put to best use to meet local housing need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The new Policy will give greater weight to people with a strong local connection to the Borough who have lived here for a minimum of 18 months or 3 out of the last 5 years.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income/savings thresholds have been re-assessed to ensure that those who can afford alternative housing options are not housed over those with more limited means
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what circumstances should someone be excluded from the housing waiting list? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to the existing unacceptable behaviour restrictions those with no strong local connection to the Borough will be excluded.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What level of priority should be placed upon different housing situations including 'reasonable preference' categories and 'local priorities'? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is proposed to revise the Banding Criteria to ensure that the best use is being made of affordable housing in the Borough. Bands 0 - 4 will be replaced by the following Bands:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urgent Housing Need High Housing Need Medium Housing Need Low Housing Need No Housing Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What provision should there be through the housing waiting list to help people move on from supported housing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only those applicants with a specified need to move to an affordable home will be as having a High Housing Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should the bedroom standard be used to measure overcrowding and if so are amendments needed to the level of priority awarded to households living in overcrowded conditions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The bedroom standard will be used and where an applicant is lacking 2 bedrooms or more they will be placed in the High Housing Need band; lacking 1 bedroom applicants placed in Medium Housing Need Band.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What level of priority should be awarded to households leaving the armed forces and should any restrictions apply? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional priority has been given for the first time for those leaving the armed forces who don't have sufficient income to meet their housing needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should households making a 'positive contribution' to the community be given additional priority on the housing waiting list, and if so, how will this be applied? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is another radical change and it is proposed that 25% of all vacancies will be advertised for those households in employment or making a positive contribution in the local community

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What priority should be awarded to potential adopters or foster carers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Carers with support from Social Services will be placed in the High Housing Need band
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should applications for priority on medical and welfare grounds be assessed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is proposed to disband the existing Medical and Welfare Panel and for Officers to consider medical issues and place Applicants in Urgent Medical and Welfare priority in the Urgent Housing Need band and for those with a High Medical/Welfare need in the High Housing Need band
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What income criteria should be used to exclude Applicants with sufficient income or assets from being accepted onto the Waiting List? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households exceeding income thresholds will be placed into the No Housing Need Band. • The criteria is as follows based on a 5x multiplier of the Local Housing Allowance levels for SO postcodes:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 Bedroom - £30,000 gross income ○ 2 Bedroom - £39,000 gross ○ 3 Bedroom - £46,500

ISSUES ARISING FROM FORMAL CONSULTATION

5. The proposed Allocations Policy and a summary version were published on Fareham Borough Council's website for consultation in December 2012. This was followed by a press release and a mail shot to all applicants on the Council's Housing Waiting List, inviting them to submit their comments through an online survey or to contact the Housing Allocations Officer to discuss their concerns and/or request a paper copy of the survey.
6. In addition all RP's with stock in the Borough were consulted, along with housing support organisations such as the YOU Trust and Two Saints, neighbouring local authorities and Hampshire County Council Supporting People team. The consultation period ended on 11 February 2013.
7. 165 responses were received to the online survey, only 21 (12%) of these were current Housing Waiting List applicants. Questions and responses listed below:
 - Do you think the Council should only allow people with a local connection to Fareham join the Housing Waiting List? **YES - 137 (84%); NO - 27 (16%)**

- Do you think the Council should lower the amount of income and savings someone can have when they apply to join the Housing Waiting List? **YES - 84 (52%); NO - 77 (48%)**
 - Do you think former members of the armed forces with a connection to Fareham should be given a priority for housing? **YES - 96 (60%); NO - 66 (40%)**
 - Do you think that households which are either working or volunteering in Fareham should be given priority for a quarter of all properties available for letting? **YES - 125 (94%); NO - 38 (24%)**
 - Do you think that households assessed as having an Urgent Need should be encouraged to accept a suitable property as soon as one becomes available? **YES - 150 (94%); NO - 11 (6%)**
8. The majority of the 165 people that responded support the proposed changes. Additional comments were received in response to the survey, many of which agreed that the local connection criteria needed to be tightened; a number of comments were made that the Council needs to be building more social housing and to restrict the number of people that could apply for them.
9. Responses were received from 5 external agencies; all of them were supportive of the proposed changes. In particular Two Saints welcomed a banding award of High Need for those living in supported accommodation where a support plan had been completed and it had been accepted by the Council that the applicant had a need for social housing.
10. Southampton City Council's Legal Services reviewed the policy and suggested minor amendments in a couple of areas to aid understanding, however, no changes were suggested in respect of the content.

TIMESCALE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

11. Amendments following the consultation exercise have since been incorporated into the policy at Appendix A.
12. The Housing Waiting List database is supported and maintained by the Council's ICT department; programming changes to support the new policy should be completed by the beginning of March 2013. In view of this anyone applying for housing will not be disadvantaged as the date they applied will be registered and new application forms will be sent to them and all of existing applicants to determine whether they qualify to remain on the Housing Waiting List and if so which band they will be placed in. Some applicants will no longer qualify to be on the Housing Waiting List, due to the restriction of the local connection criteria, some will see their position on the list decrease and this could mean that some local people will be unhappy with the outcome.
13. It is estimated that the re banding of existing applicants will be completed by the end of March 2013, following this, the data will be subject to testing before being transferred to a Live system, anticipated to be mid to late April 2013.
14. Providing the testing of the new database does not reveal any major problems, the new Allocations Policy should be fully operational with effect from May 2013.

15. It is proposed to reconvene the Member Officer Working Group six months after the policy has been adopted to identify areas where amendments may be necessary. The first Working Group will therefore meet in November 2013 and seek to report their findings early in 2014.

RISK ASSESSMENT

16. The Council must ensure that the proposed Allocations Policy is lawful, meets good practice, is in accordance with Equalities legislation, and that the limited social housing available in the Borough is put to best use.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

17. The cost can be met from existing budgets.

CONCLUSION

18. The Allocations Policy is important as it sets out the criteria upon which affordable housing owned by the Council and Registered Providers will be allocated. The way in which the Council decides to allocate affordable housing will have a direct impact upon some of the most vulnerable residents in the Borough

Reference Papers: Localism Act 2011

Welfare Reform Act 2012

Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for local housing authorities in England June 2012