

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision 16 December 2019

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Housing
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Approval of Draft Housing Allocations Policy</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	The Deputy Chief Executive Officer
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Providing Housing Choices

**Purpose:**

To review the consultation results on the Draft Housing Allocations Policy and adopt the final version.

**Executive summary:**

Local housing authorities have a duty to make sure that homes, which they own or have nomination rights to, are let in accordance with a published allocation scheme. The allocation scheme must describe the procedure for letting homes and for determining the relative priority accorded to different categories of applicants.

At its meeting of 2 September 2019, the Executive approved a new Draft Housing Allocations Policy for a six-week period of consultation.

Public consultation took place between 16 September and 25 October 2019, with a total of 187 comments received.

As a result of the consultation some small changes have been made to the draft version to inform the final version of the Housing Allocations Policy which is recommended for adoption.

**Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (a) notes the feedback received from the public consultation exercise, together with the proposed changes to the policy, as outlined in this report; and
- (b) adopts the Housing Allocations Policy, as attached at Appendix A of this report, to formally replace the current Allocations Policy (2014).

**Reason:**

To adopt an up-to-date Housing Allocations Policy that is in accordance with current legislation and statutory guidance which meets the purpose of the Housing Options Service to “*understand each customer’s housing problem and help them to solve it*”.

**Cost of proposals:**

The costs involved with the preparation and adoption of the Housing Allocations Policy are covered in the existing Housing Options operational budget.

**Appendices:**                    **A: Housing Allocations Policy**  
   **B: Equalities Impact Assessment**

**Background papers:**   **None**

**Reference papers:**       **None**

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### Executive Briefing Paper

<b>Date:</b>	16 December 2019
<b>Subject:</b>	Approval of Draft Housing Allocations Policy
<b>Briefing by:</b>	The Deputy Chief Executive Officer
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Housing

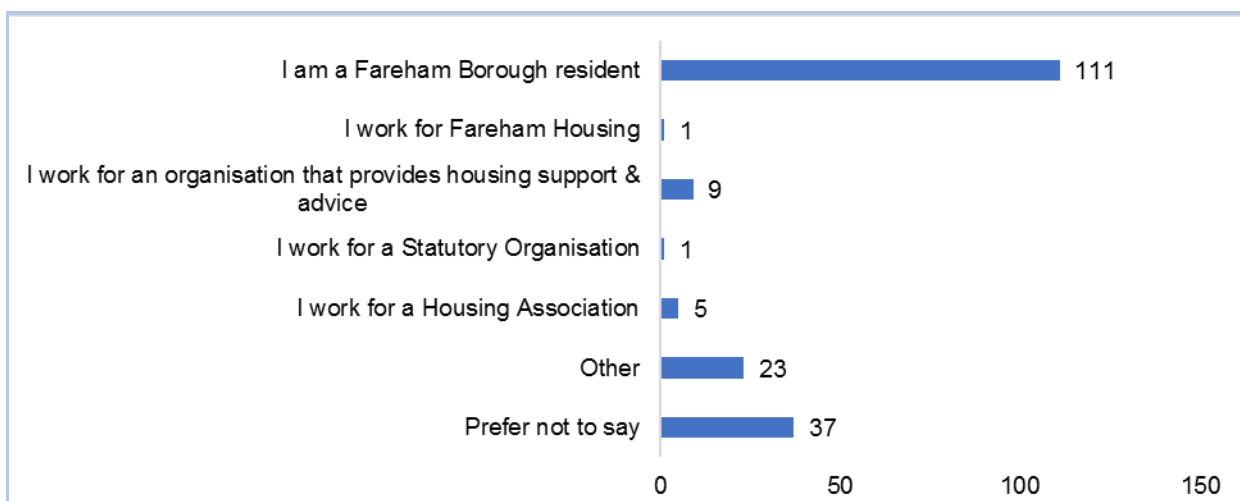
#### INTRODUCTION

1. Since the publication of the existing Allocations Policy (2014) there have been several changes in legislation and statutory guidance. The Housing Service has also undertaken a 'systems-thinking' review resulting in significant changes to the way allocations to social housing are dealt with. These changes necessitated a new Policy to be drafted and consulted upon ready for adoption.
2. To ensure progression of an updated Allocations Policy, approval for public consultation on the draft was granted at the 2 September Executive meeting. To avoid any confusion with housing allocations made under the Local Plan, the consultation document was entitled 'Optimising Social Housing (Applications and Allocations) Policy'. In a formal context, this title will remain, hereafter in this report, it will be referred to as the 'Allocations Policy'.
3. The six-week consultation took place between 16 September and 25 October. The responses have been considered and some amendments have been made to inform the final document, included as Appendix A to this report.

#### SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

4. The Housing Act (1996), states that an authority must notify those likely to be affected by any major changes made to an allocation scheme. In accordance with this legislation, all applicants on the housing register and all Registered Providers with nomination agreements with the Council were written to.
5. Letters were also sent to the following partners who may be indirectly affected by the changes:
  - Two Saints
  - All Local Authorities bordering Fareham
  - Hampshire County Council
  - MPs for Fareham and Gosport
  - Friends of the Homeless

- NHS England
- The notification letter set out the details of the consultation and invited comments by way of an online survey on the 'Have Your Say' pages of the Council's website. A summary of the changes was enclosed with the letter, so customers could easily reference the amendments proposed.
  - To ensure a comprehensive consultation, the following methods were also employed to draw attention to the exercise:
    - Notification via the Council's E-Panel
    - On the Council's Consultation web page and a further link via the Housing webpage
    - Paper copies of the draft Allocation Policy made available at the Civic Offices
    - Banners advertising the consultation posted in the Civic Offices Reception area
    - As an item at the 11 July Scrutiny Panel
    - Social Media posts
  - In total 187 responses were received during the consultation period, the following graph shows the breakdown of respondents:



- A full consultation statement will be published on the Council's 'Have Your Say' pages in due course.
- At the 11 July 2019 Housing Scrutiny Panel, Members were invited to comment on the draft policy prior to Executive approval for consultation. Only one change was made following Members' comments, the term "waiting list" was changed to "housing register" within the document. Members felt this change was necessary to avoid the perception that over time, applicants would move up the list regardless of their level of need.

## THE POLICY CHANGES

### Ending the choice-based lettings scheme and introduce a best-match direct letting scheme

- There was strong support for the change from Choice-based lettings (CBL) to the best-match direct scheme, 44% strongly agreed and 41% agreed with the proposals. Some of the comments received stated that CBL was 'disheartening' and the move to best-match will prevent people needlessly waiting.
- Some comments did express concerns that a direct letting scheme may result in

applicants being unhappy with the property allocated to them. The results from the systems-thinking experiment showed an increase positive feedback from our customers. The detailed understanding of the customers' circumstances gained in the initial stage will inform the housing allocation, mitigating against most refusals. In addition, customers will have the opportunity to discuss any reasons for refusal, thereby enabling a more appropriate match in the future.

13. Therefore, the best-match direct letting scheme will replace the CBL scheme.

#### **Renaming the priority bands**

14. By renaming the priority bands from 'Urgent, High, Medium and Low' to 'A, B, C, D' it was hoped that customers would not feel as if they were a low priority for the Council if placed in the 'low band'. 41% of the responses neither approved nor disapproved of the change. The comments received felt that a name change would not alter any perception of the applicants' position as customers would soon come to understand which band was 'low'.
15. Therefore, the Priority Bands will remain as 'Urgent, High, Medium and Low'.

#### **Other miscellaneous changes**

16. The following minor changes were proposed and will be included in the final document:
  - The amendment within the medical priorities to include sensory and mental health conditions. 43% agreed and 40% strongly agreed with this inclusion.
  - The removal of an income threshold, instead Officers will use the detailed understanding of the individual's circumstances to guide customers into making an informed housing choice. 48% agreed and 26% strongly agreed with this removal.
  - Inclusion of clearer qualification criteria for sheltered housing. There was broad agreement that the qualification criteria were clearer with the amendment.
  - The removal of the criteria; '*a person or household living in any moveable structure with or without formal tenancy arrangements*' 40% neither agreed / disagreed and 33% agreed with this removal.
  - The removal of the criteria; '*a tenant living in the borough with dependent children living above the ground floor*'. 34% agreed and 21% strongly agreed with this removal.

#### **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

17. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken of the Housing Allocations Policy. This has been included as Appendix B of this report. No significant impacts have been identified in relation to the adoption of the Housing Allocations Policy.

#### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Fleur Allaway – Housing Policy Officer. (Ext. 4304)