

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

**Date**                    **30 November 2023**

**Report of:**            **Director of Housing**

**Subject:**              **Draft Housing Allocations Policy**

#### **SUMMARY**

This report provides Members with a summary of the changes proposed to the existing housing allocations policy. The draft revised policy will be subject to full consultation, which is expected to commence in January 2024.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Panel notes the contents of this report and comment or raise any points for further clarification.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Housing Act requires that all local authorities have a scheme for determining priorities and procedures in allocating social housing. This covers the allocation of general needs and sheltered accommodation at both social and affordable rents.
2. The allocation scheme and the associated housing register is operated by the Council on behalf of the Registered Providers that own social/affordable rented homes in the Borough. They are used when nominating individuals/families to available social/affordable rented homes owned by Registered Providers, and those owned by the Council.
3. The current allocations policy (Optimising Social Housing: Applications and Allocations Policy) was adopted in 2020. The policy should be reviewed regularly in order to ensure it meets all legislative requirements. In addition, it is recognised that there is a need for more transparency and better information for customers, and also to better reflect the needs of the community and meet local priorities.
4. A review to the current adopted allocations policy has now been undertaken by Officers (draft Allocations Policy included at Appendix A to this report). Subject to consultation and agreement by the Executive, it is anticipated that this would supersede the Optimising Social Housing: Applications and Allocations Policy (2020).

## **GENERAL CHANGES**

5. Some general changes are proposed as part of the draft Allocations Policy.
  - i. More information has been included to explain the process of application (paragraph 23 of Appendix A), prioritisation on the housing register (paragraphs 35 and 36 of Appendix A, and Appendix B) and allocation of properties (paragraph 40 of Appendix A). There is also clarification on qualification criteria to join the housing register, which now explains more about local connections through work and the need to give or receive essential care and support.
  - ii. Information has been provided confirming that Registered Provider policies may differ from our own, especially with regard to sharing of bedrooms.
  - iii. General information is included to explain the types of Council owned sheltered accommodation schemes available in the borough and the level of care provided/not provided within these schemes.
  - iv. The requirement for an annual review of applicants has also been reinstated. Applicants who do not respond can be removed from the housing register. Paragraph 31 of the draft policy provides detail on the number and type of contacts made and the process involved. This was included in an earlier allocation policy published in 2013 and is considered a useful tool to understand the changes in housing need, so has been brought back.

## **SPECIFIC CHANGES**

6. In addition to general changes, more specific changes are proposed as part of the draft Allocations Policy.
  - i. The policy now confirms that applicants who do not meet any of the priority categories do not qualify to join the list. It also confirms that all management moves will need to go through the Housing Options assessment process. A management move involves transferring an existing social housing tenant from one property to another because of an identified need. Examples include the property becoming unsuitable following a reduction in mobility or tenants being significantly affected by anti-social behaviour or harassment. A report will be required from the social housing landlord to support the need for a move. More details can be found in paragraph 32 of the draft policy at Appendix A, and in Appendix B, High band, category 3.
  - ii. Some home-owners under the age of 55 are now able to join the housing register, for example, people who are in significant and unsustainable negative equity or for whom it is not safe to remain in their homes. People in privately rented accommodation that is of adequate size and is affordable will not be able to join the housing register unless they have dependent children and are living in accommodation where they share facilities such as bathrooms or kitchens.
  - iii. The priority banding has been reviewed to provide more clarity, additional criteria and to give a higher priority to some categories of applicants, such as homeless people for whom we have accepted a main duty. This will help to move them on faster from B&B and temporary accommodation into more settled accommodation and reduce the high cost of emergency accommodation.
  - iv. In order to ensure high demand properties are recycled more frequently, a higher priority has been given to those needing to downsize by two or more bedrooms and also to customers who have a property with structural adaptations which are no longer needed. To assist with the above, it is intended that flexible tenancies will be issued for all applicants who are allocated a Council owned property with 4 or more bedrooms or with structural adaptations.
  - v. There are currently no confirmed local lettings plans, but the policy allows for these to be created in the future, as needed (paragraph 46). These would enable the Council to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories. The intention is to create mixed and balanced communities in new development areas. For example, the development to the East of Newgate Lane has to submit a Community Letting Plan to ensure the vacancies are sensitively filled.

## **CONSULTATION**

7. Subject to Executive approval, it is expected that the draft policy will go out for consultation in January 2024 for a period of six weeks. Consultees will include Registered Providers, Hampshire County Council Adult Services and Children's Services, NHS Hampshire, Probation Service, partner agencies, other appropriate referral agencies, people on the housing register and

members of the public. The consultation documents will be sent out to organisations as listed above and will also be available in the Civic Offices and on the Council website.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

8. If all proposed changes are brought in, a review of the housing register will be required in order to ensure that all existing applicants are within the correct priority band. It is anticipated that a considerable number of applicants will need to have their priority increased, for example, many of the homeless applicants. With around 600 applicants on the housing register at present and a number in the process, this will take a significant amount of time and Officers will be considering the most appropriate way to resource this work, whilst minimising disruption to the process of allocating homes.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

9. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

## **CONCLUSION**

10. A number of areas of the policy are proposed to be updated or expanded to provide better clarity for customers. Some specific changes have been made to enable certain types of applicants to join or to be excluded from the housing register, or to be prioritised differently.
11. The draft policy is intended to go to the Executive in December, this to seek approval to undertake public consultation lasting six weeks, which is expected to begin in January 2024.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A - Draft Allocation Policy

Appendix B – Draft Allocation Policy, Appendix 1 – Priority banding criteria

Appendix C – Draft Allocation Policy, Appendix 2 – List of registered providers

### **Background Papers:**

None

### **Reference Papers:**

Fareham Borough Council Optimising Social Housing: Applications and Allocations Policy 2020.

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Andrea Howells, 01329 824370.