

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision 11 December 2023

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Housing
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Housing Allocations Policy</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Housing
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Provide Housing Choices

**Purpose:**

To approve the draft Housing Allocations Policy for a six-week period of consultation.

**Executive summary:**

The Housing Act requires that all local authorities have a scheme for determining priorities and procedures in allocating social housing, both owned by themselves and for which they have nomination rights. This covers the allocation of general needs and sheltered accommodation at both social and affordable rents.

The allocation scheme and the associated housing register, often referred to as the housing waiting list, 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 applicants to available social and affordable rented homes owned by Registered Providers, and those owned by the Council.

The current allocations policy (Optimising Social Housing: Applications and Allocations Policy) was adopted in 2020. The policy must 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.

A review of the current adopted allocations policy has now been undertaken by Officers and a revised draft Allocations Policy is 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).

If approved, this draft policy will be published for a six-week period of public consultation. Following this period, and once any necessary amendments are incorporated, it is intended that the Housing Allocations Policy will be presented to the Executive for adoption (replacing the current Housing Allocations Policy).

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the policy has been undertaken and is included as Appendix C to the report. No detrimental impacts have been identified as a result of the proposed changes.

The draft Allocations Policy will be discussed at Housing Scrutiny Panel on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Due to the short amount of time between the two meetings, verbal updates on the Panel feedback will be provided to the Executive meeting as required.

**Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

It is recommended that the Executive agree to public consultation for a period of six weeks on the draft Housing Allocations Policy, as provided in Appendix A to the report.

**Reason:**

To provide a review of the existing allocations policy to ensure it meets with legislative requirements, to improve transparency/information for customers, and contribute to the Corporate Priority to Provide Housing Choices.

**Cost of proposals:**

The costs of publication and consultation are covered in the existing Housing Options operational budget.

**Appendices:**

**A:** Draft Allocations Policy

**B:** Priority Banding Criteria (Appendix 1 of the draft Allocations Policy)

**C:** Equality Impact Assessment

**Background papers:** None

**Reference papers:** Optimising Social Housing: Applications and Allocations Policy - 2020

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Executive Briefing Paper

<b>Date:</b>	11 December 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Housing Allocations Policy
<b>Briefing by:</b>	Director of Housing
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Housing

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The Housing Act requires that all local authorities have a scheme for determining priorities and procedures in allocating social housing, both owned by themselves and for which they have nomination rights. 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, often referred to as the housing waiting list, 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 applicants to available social and 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 must 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 of the current adopted allocations policy has now been undertaken by Officers and a revised draft Allocations Policy is 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.
6. More information has been included to explain the process of application (paragraph 23 of Appendix A), prioritisation of applicants on the housing register (paragraphs 35 and 36 of Appendix and Appendix B) and the allocation of properties (paragraph 40 of Appendix A).
7. 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.

8. Information has been provided confirming that Registered Provider policies may differ from our own, especially with regard to sharing of bedrooms. Registered Providers allocate a separate bedroom for any child aged 16 years or more, whereas the Council policy allows for same sex siblings to share a bedroom until the age of 20 years of age.
9. 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. Sheltered schemes are available for applicants aged 55 or more and offer a variety of different levels of assistance. However, there are no extra care schemes within the borough. The Council is able to refer applicants needing extra care to Gosport Borough Council where there is a suitable scheme.
10. 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 with applicants 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**

11. In addition to general changes, more specific changes are proposed as part of the draft Allocations Policy.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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. The tenancies are likely to be issued for five years and reviewed in the six month period prior to expiry in order to determine whether the property size and type is still required for the occupying household. A standard process will be followed to ensure that a household needing a smaller property or one without adaptations can be moved to alternative suitable accommodation as quickly as possible, while taking account of the sensitivity needed around changes in family circumstances. Tenants who move through this process will not lose any security of tenure.

16. 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.

### **HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL**

17. The draft Allocations Policy will be discussed at Housing Scrutiny Panel on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Due to the short amount of time between the two meetings, verbal updates on the Panel feedback will be provided to the Executive meeting as required.

### **CONSULTATION**

18. The Housing Act 1996, section 166A(13) requires local authorities to consult on a draft allocation scheme or proposed alterations to an existing scheme which reflect a change in policy. Every Registered Provider with which the authority has nomination arrangements must be consulted, along with any other parties who may be affected by the changes.
19. 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**

20. 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. There is no proposal to increase staffing resources to manage this work.

### **IMPACT OF THE CHANGES**

21. A random 20% sample of the current housing register has been reviewed to determine how many applicants may change priority banding if the proposed changes are brought in. Within the sample, 40% of applications would remain in the same priority band, 24% would have an increased priority and 2.5% would have a decreased priority. The remaining 33.5% would no longer qualify to join the housing register. This last figure relates mainly to applicants living in privately rented accommodation which is of adequate size for their household, is affordable and does not require families with children to share facilities with other households. These households who can manage in the private rented sector are considered not to have a need for social housing.
22. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the policy has been undertaken and is included as Appendix C to the report. This will be updated as the consultation progresses. No detrimental impacts have been identified as a result of the proposed changes to date.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS/CARBON IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

23. The subject matter of this report is not anticipated to have an impact on the Council's carbon footprint, nor is it expected to have a detrimental or beneficial impact to the wider environment.

#### **Enquiries:**

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