

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Health and Housing Policy Development Review Panel

Date **14 November 2013**

Report of: **Director of Community**

Subject: **ALLOCATIONS POLICY - SIX MONTH REVIEW**

SUMMARY

This Report summarises the review undertaken of the Allocations Policy since its implementation on 1 May 2013 and incorporates the views of the original Member Officer Working Group, which was reconvened to assess the impact of the new Policy. There are a number of minor changes to the Policy proposed to reflect the issues identified through the review.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel endorses the proposed amendments to the Allocations Policy, for these to be subject to consultation before reporting to the Executive for implementation from 1 April 2014.

INTRODUCTION

1. The current Allocations Policy was agreed by the Executive in March 2013 and implemented on 1 May 2013. The Policy introduced a number of changes, the outcome and impact, of which could not be fully anticipated until the policy had been operational for a period of time. It was therefore agreed that the Member Officer Working Group would be reconvened after 6 months of operation, to review the changes and consider whether any amendments were needed.

KEY ISSUES CONSIDERED BY WORKING GROUP

| New Policy Criteria | Impact | Proposed Amendment |
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| <p>Local Connection</p> <p>Restricted to the last 18 months or 3 out of the last 5 years residency in the Borough</p> | <p>161 applicants previously on the Housing Waiting List (HWL) are now excluded</p> <p>These include applicants that have lived the majority of their lives in the Borough but not the last 5 years, but still have all their family resident in the area</p> | <p>To add to the local connection criteria to allow those who can demonstrate a long standing connection to Fareham to join the HWL</p> <p><i>E.g. Born and lived in Fareham up to the age of 50, moved out for the past 5 years to care for a relative, now wishing to return.</i></p> <p><i>*see paragraph 5 for further changes to local connection criteria</i></p> |
| <p>Local Connection</p> <p>Moving to give or receive essential care and support to a close family member</p> | <p>Those applicants whose only connection is having a close family member in the borough are now excluded unless they can demonstrate a need to move to the borough to give or receive essential care and support</p> <p>This has resulted in a number of review requests, challenging the definition of “essential care and support”</p> | <p>To include in the policy a definition of “essential care and support”</p> <p><i>E.g. Without care and support, being given or received the household would be unable to maintain independent living, to the extent that they would need to pay for care to be provided to help with bathing, dressing, cooking etc. or they would need to move to accommodation where care and support is provided</i></p> |

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| <p>Exclusions</p> <p>Arrears threshold reduced to £500</p> | <p>43 households are now excluded broken down as follows:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>£500 – £750</td> <td>8 households</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£751 - £1000</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£1001 - £2000</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£2001+</td> <td>14</td> </tr> </table> | £500 – £750 | 8 households | £751 - £1000 | 6 | £1001 - £2000 | 15 | £2001+ | 14 | <p>No amendment proposed, threshold of £500 considered appropriate</p> |
| £500 – £750 | 8 households | | | | | | | | | |
| £751 - £1000 | 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| £1001 - £2000 | 15 | | | | | | | | | |
| £2001+ | 14 | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>No Housing Need</p> <p>Income and savings thresholds</p> | <p>34 households in NO Housing Need due to having income and savings over the new thresholds</p> <p>Of these:- 28 would be in Low Housing Need band. 5 would be in Medium 1 would be in High</p> | <p>To retain the income and savings calculation but to add that this will be increased by 1% every year in April</p> <p><i>To ensure that any applications assessed as being in NO Housing Need are checked by the Allocations Officer to establish that there are no other factors that would place them in High or Urgent Need</i></p> | | | | | | | | |
| <p>No Housing Need</p> <p>Adequately housed social housing tenants & owner occupiers</p> | <p>230 applicants now assessed as being in NO Housing Need (includes 34 households above)</p> <p>These applicants are adequately housed social housing tenants, owner occupiers or those with the financial means to secure accommodation in the private rented sector. They have little or no prospect of ever being successful for an offer of accommodation via the HWL</p> | <p>To ensure the above assessment is carried out for those above the income and savings threshold.</p> <p>To remove the NO Housing Need Band with effect from 1 April 2014 to reduce administration and giving applicants false expectations</p> | | | | | | | | |

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| <p>Positive Contribution</p> <p>25% of properties advertised giving preference to those working or volunteering</p> | <p>11 properties have been advertised to date giving preference to this group.</p> <p>Of these, 10 were offered to a positive contributor who was not the highest placed applicant</p> <p>Giving preference for 25% of vacancies to those making a positive contribution is enabling those that are not in the High or Medium Need Band but who are working or volunteering to be successful for an offer of accommodation</p> | <p>Continue to advertise 25% of all properties giving preference to this group.</p> <p>In addition implement a Local Lettings Plan for the following blocks of flats for a set period of time giving preference for 50% of all vacancies to applicants making a positive contribution to assist with regeneration plans and to create a more balanced community:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arras House, Fareham NW • St Julien House, Fareham South • Flats 51-97 Valentine Close, Fareham NW |
| <p>Medical and Welfare</p> <p>Medical and Welfare Panel disbanded. Decisions over priority made by Housing Options Officers (HOO)</p> | <p>Increase in the number of invoices from GP practices, as supporting information is required to enable Officers to make the correct assessments</p> <p>Many reports received from GP's do not adequately address the issue of how the applicants housing situation impacts on their health and welfare</p> | <p>To continue to request medical reports to ensure proper consideration is given to all applications.</p> <p>Where information is not forthcoming about the effect of the housing situation upon an applicants health, HOO to undertake home visit.</p> <p>Raise the issue of GP's charging standard fees and providing comprehensive assessments with the Clinical Commissioning Group</p> |

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| <p>Reduced Priority</p> <p>Those adequately housed in the private rented sector reassessed as being in LOW Housing Need</p> | <p>Previously all those in the private rented sector, were in the same band as those living in Council Temporary Accommodation (TA)</p> <p>Lowering the priority of those adequately housed in the private rented sector or living with family / friends compared with those in TA has resulted in twice as many households in TA being offered accommodation via the HWL in the first 6 months of operation compared to the previous 12 months.</p> <p>The average wait for a household in TA to be offered accommodation via the HWL has been reduced from 2.6 years to 1.6 years.</p> | <p>No amendment proposed, reducing the priority of adequately housed households in the private rented sector has had the desired effect of increasing movement through TA.</p> |
| <p>Increased Priority</p> <p>Social housing tenants under occupying by 2 bedrooms awarded High Housing Need</p> <p>Social housing tenants under occupying by 1 bedroom awarded Medium Housing Need</p> | <p>Increased priority was awarded to these households in response to the bedroom subsidy; however, the number of households applying to the HWL on this ground has not increased substantially.</p> <p>Possible reasons for this:</p> <p>Many households now registered with HomeSwapper</p> <p>Those over pensionable age not effected by the bedroom subsidy</p> | <p>No amendment proposed</p> <p>Consider hosting a mutual exchange event to facilitate those households under occupying to meet with those households over occupying</p> |

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

2. Two of the proposed amendments have already been implemented; these are, applying a clear definition of “essential care and support”, this was introduced in order to determine review requests. The other is the checking of applications assessed as being over the income and savings threshold to establish if there are any other factors that would place the application into the High or Urgent Band.
3. The removal of the NO Housing Need Band and the extension of the local connection criteria will be subject to consultation and it is therefore proposed to consult on these changes for 6 weeks from January 2014 to the middle of February 2014. Once the consultation is completed a Report will be prepared for the Executive in March 2014 setting out the results of the consultation and the new Policy will be implemented on 1 April 2014.
4. The introduction of a Local Lettings Plan for certain blocks of flats will be published in accordance with the Allocations Code of Guidance. The publication will set out the objectives and evidence base upon which the plan is framed and the period for which the plan will run.
5. On the 14 October 2013, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued a consultation document on strengthening statutory guidance on social housing allocations. The new guidance strongly encourages all local authorities to adopt a *two year* residency test as part of their qualification criteria. It also recognises that people may have a local connection to an area even if they do not currently live there or have not lived there for long enough. In this respect the guidance will encourage all local authorities to consider adopting other qualification criteria alongside the residency test so that people who are able to demonstrate a strong association to the local area are not disadvantaged. As part of the review, it had already been recognised that the Allocations Policy needed to extend the qualification criteria to include those that could demonstrate a strong local connection. The current 18 months residency connection will be extended to two years to meet with the statutory guidance.

RISK ASSESSMENT

6. The Council must ensure that the 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.

CONCLUSION

7. The review of the Allocations Policy has identified a couple of areas where further definition and a change in procedure would enable a fairer and more consistent approach to be taken in the assessment of applications to the Housing Waiting List. It has been established that changing the priority given to certain households in the private rented sector has had the desired effect of enabling more homeless households in Temporary Accommodation to be successful for offers of permanent accommodation. In addition advertising 25% of all properties giving preference to those making a positive contribution also

appears to be successful in enabling this group to be offered accommodation from lower positions on the list.

Background Papers:

Reports to Housing PDR Panel March and July 2012:- Consultations on the New Allocations Code of Guidance

Report to Health and Housing PDR Panel November 2012: – Nominations Policy Review

Report to Executive March 2013: – Housing Allocations Policy

Reference Papers:

Localism Act 2011

Welfare Reform Act 2012

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

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Sara Head. (Ext 4369)