

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date: 11 April 2024

Report of: Director of Housing

Subject: Allocations Policy: Update following consultation on the draft policy

SUMMARY

This report provides Members with an update following full consultation on the draft Allocations Policy and also incorporates how this is aligned and impacted by the current Government consultation on reforms to social housing allocations.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Housing Scrutiny Panel comments or raises any points for further clarification and notes the contents of this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. Ahead of full consultation, the Housing Scrutiny Panel were previously provided with a draft Housing Allocations Policy on 30 November 2023, with an accompanying report outlining the changes proposed to the existing housing allocations policy (Optimising Social Housing: Applications and Allocations Policy) which was adopted in 2020.
2. The purpose of this report is two-fold, namely, to update Panel on the consultation feedback, and to outline how this is aligned with the current Government consultation on reforms to Social Housing Allocations.

CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

3. The consultation entailed a questionnaire seeking views on the key changes proposed within the new policy, and to what extent respondents agreed. 149 respondents completed consultation feedback. The summary feedback is provided as follows:
 - i. The updated policy stipulates that some home-owners under the age of 55 could be eligible to join the housing register where, for example, they are in significant and unsustainable negative equity or for whom it is not safe to remain in their homes. Responses are mixed, with only 53% of respondents in agreement with this proposal. Where applications of this nature are made, careful consideration would take place to ensure supporting financial information and fraud checks are undertaken, and that all other eligibility criteria are satisfied.
 - ii. 77% of respondents are in support for allowing people to apply to the register online (in addition to in person or over the phone). This supports development work in the team currently being undertaken to help make the process more efficient and offer self-service for customers who don't require in person support to make an application.
 - iii. 91% of respondents agree not to allow applicants with property overseas and/or income from overseas to join the Housing Register.
 - iv. 95% of respondents agree that all applications to the Housing Register should be reviewed annually. Applicants who do not engage with this review 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 reintroducing this check is considered vital to help ensure allocations go to those households most in housing need.
 - v. The priority banding has been reviewed to provide a higher priority to some categories of applicants, such as homeless people for whom we have accepted a main housing 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 to the Council. 59% of respondents agree with this approach, with 9% stating they neither agree or disagree or don't know.
 - vi. 84% of respondents agree that families in temporary or emergency accommodation should receive priority banding. 59% of respondents agree that any homeless household without children and owed a main housing duty who has been in B&B for longer than 4 months will receive an increased priority. The council review every emergency placement in B&B, and in the case of single applications, where a main housing duty is owed due to the shortage of 1-bedroom temporary accommodation and affordable housing, placements can be lengthy. Increased priority will help

address this.

- vii. The council's approach to tackling under occupation is supported, with 81% of respondents agreeing that the highest priority banding will be given to any tenant wanting to downsize by 2 or more bedrooms.
- viii. The council's approach to using flexible tenancies for all tenancies with 4 or more bedrooms or with structural adaptations has also been supported, with 89% of respondents agreeing that tenancies are reviewed so that tenants who no longer need this type of property can be offered a more suitable one at the point their fixed term period comes to an end.

GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON REFORMS TO SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

- 4. Alongside the current Allocations Policy review, on 30th January 2024 the Government commenced consultation on reforms to social housing allocations. This consultation is due to close on 26th March. The consultation seeks views on proposals to:
 - i. Introduce a United Kingdom (UK) connection test, to ensure that it is those with the closest connection to the UK who are eligible for a social home;
 - ii. Mandate the following tests: local connection test, income test, false statement test, and tests for anti-social behaviour and terrorism offences;
 - iii. Introduce a new ground for eviction for those who are convicted of terrorism offences, and implementation of a 'three strikes and you're out' policy for anti-social behaviour.
- 5. The current social housing allocations provisions are contained within Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. The consultation us to inform secondary legislation that is proposed to be made under this part of the Act.
- 6. A comparison table illustrating the draft allocations policy and the government proposals has been attached as Appendix A to this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

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

CONCLUSION

- 8. Given the current government reform proposed in social housing allocations and the impact these identify in line with the draft allocations policy, it is therefore recommended that work in ratifying and implementing the policy is paused.

Appendices: Appendix A – Table of comparison between draft allocations policy and Government consultation on reforms to social housing allocations.

Background Papers: None

Reference Papers: Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel, 30 November 2023, Draft Housing Allocations Policy

Enquiries:

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