

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 3 March 2014

Portfolio:	Health and Housing
Subject:	Housing Allocations Policy
Report of:	Director of Community
Strategy/Policy:	Housing Strategy / Allocations Policy
Corporate Objective:	A Balanced Housing Market

Purpose:

This report seeks the Executive's approval to implement amendments to the Housing Allocations Policy.

Executive summary:

The Council's new Housing Allocations Policy went live on 1st May 2013.

The Member Officer Working Group which had overseen the development of this policy was reconvened in October 2013 to evaluate the impact of the new policy and consider the need for any changes.

The findings and proposed changes were reported to the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel in November 2013, prior to being issued for public consultation.

This report summarises the findings of the Member Officer Working Group, and considers the issues raised through the formal consultation.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

That the Executive approves the proposed amendments to the Housing Allocations Policy for implementation from 1 April 2014.

Reason:

To ensure that the Housing Allocations Policy reflects changes introduced through Statutory Guidance and rationalises the Housing Waiting List by removing applications that have no prospect of being successful for an offer of accommodation.

Cost of proposals:

The cost can be met from existing budgets.

Appendices: **A:** Allocations Policy

Background papers: Health & Housing PDR Panel Report 14 November 2013:
Allocations Policy – Six Month Review

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BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Briefing Paper

Date: 3 March 2014

Subject: Allocations Policy

Briefing by: Director of Community

Portfolio: Health and Housing

INTRODUCTION

1. The current Allocations Policy was agreed by the Executive in March 2013 and implemented on 1 May 2013. The new 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.

2. KEY ISSUES CONSIDERED BY WORKING GROUP

New Policy Criteria	Impact	Proposed Amendment
<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 association to Fareham to join the HWL</p> <p>To increase the connection period from 18 months to 2 years.</p> <p>To remove the 3 out of the last 5 years connection criteria</p> <p><i>*see paragraph 6 for a more detailed explanation of the changes to the 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>								
<p>Exclusions</p> <p>Arrears threshold reduced to £500</p>	<p>43 households are now excluded, 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>
<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 (Nov 2013) 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 upon 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 applicant's health, Housing Options Officer 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>
<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>
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IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

3. 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. (A full definition has since been added to the Allocations Policy). 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.
4. The removal of the NO Housing Need Band and the extension of the local connection criteria have been subject to formal consultation since being raised at the Health and Housing Panel, and those applicants in the NO Housing Need Band have been individually written to. However, before any applications are removed a thorough review will be carried out to ensure that no higher band factors apply. As part of the review of the applications in the NO Housing Need Band, it was concluded that two extra criteria needed to be added to the LOW Housing Need Band to capture those households that require the support offered in sheltered housing schemes. This is felt necessary as the threshold to be awarded a Medium Medical Priority is higher than the need for the support offered in a sheltered housing scheme and it is possible that some households whilst having NO housing need due to owning a property or having sufficient assets, would still benefit from the support of the services offered by the Sheltered Housing Team. Applicants meeting these two new criteria will not however be prioritised according to their application date within the LOW Housing Need Band, instead they will only be considered for an offer of sheltered accommodation, if there are no other suitable applicants within this band. This is to recognise that other applicants within the LOW Housing Need Band do not have the financial means with which to improve their housing situation.
5. Social housing tenants within the borough that are under occupying their accommodation have been awarded an increased priority on the Housing Waiting List, however, the number of under occupying tenants registering for a move has

not increased significantly. In order to try and help tenants identify suitable exchange opportunities, an event was held in February for under and over occupying tenants.

6. On 31 December 2013 the Department for Communities and Local Government issued Statutory Guidance on “Providing social housing for local people”. The Government is of the view that local authorities should ensure that they prioritise applicants who can demonstrate a close association to their area and the Secretary of State believes that a reasonable period of residency would be at least two years. As a result of this guidance it is recommended that the local connection requirement is increased from 18 months to two years and that the 3 out of the last 5 years criteria is removed and replaced with a strong association criteria. A full definition of what constitutes a strong association is included in the updated Allocations Policy at Appendix A.
7. The introduction of a Local Lettings Plan for the three blocks of flats identified above 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.
8. In response to a recent announcement by Hampshire County Council that Supporting People funding will be withdrawn for sheltered housing schemes, the Council will need to review the level of support it is able to provide in such schemes, which may result in a change as to who is considered eligible in the future. Tenancy Services have already proposed to introduce local lettings plans for some of the upper floor flats in a number of sheltered schemes, these proposals along with the outcome of discussions with the County Council over the future funding of sheltered housing will be presented to the Executive for approval.
9. An Equality Impact Assessment of the policy was carried out in February 2013. The changes proposed are in response to Government guidance, and consultation has been carried out with those affected, the policy will continue to be monitored and reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure that no specific groups are disadvantaged.

ISSUES ARISING FROM FORMAL CONSULTATION

10. A number of external agencies and neighbouring local authorities commented on the proposals. All were supportive of the changes and in agreement that the removal of the NO Housing Need Band was a logical step to take, having satisfied ourselves that those with exceptional needs would still be able to qualify.
11. All those that commented suggested having a clear definition around what constitutes a strong association with the borough, and it is hoped that this has been achieved; the full definition is set out in Appendix 10 of the Allocations Policy.

RISK ASSESSMENT

12. 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.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13. The cost can be met from existing budgets.

CONCLUSION

14. The Allocations Policy is important as it sets out the criteria upon which affordable housing owned by the Council and Registered Providers will be allocated. The way in which the Council decides to allocate affordable housing has a direct impact upon some of the most vulnerable households in the Borough.

Reference Papers: Localism Act 2011

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

Statutory Guidance: Providing social housing for local people: December 2013