

6. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME

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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Community, Housing and Planning
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Purpose of Report

1. To seek the Committee's endorsement of a number of revisions to the Housing Allocation Scheme, for agreement by Council.

Summary

2. Following the implementation on 1st April 2017 of a revised Housing Allocation Scheme the need for further revisions has arisen.
3. This report sets out the amendments proposed to the following aspects of the Housing Allocation Scheme.
 - Applicants who do not qualify to be on the housing register
 - Bidding
4. In addition, a number of minor textual amendments have been made to some paragraphs to clarify, but not change, the meaning.
5. A summary of the proposed revisions has been sent to key partner organisations for their comments. A verbal report will be made to the Committee on any comments that are received.

Recommendation

6. **Members are recommended to endorse to full Council the revised Housing Allocation Scheme at Appendix 1 to take effect from April 2018.**

Background

7. Local authorities can only allocate affordable homes in accordance with their adopted Housing Allocation Scheme.
8. A review of the Scheme provides an opportunity to make minor clarification amendments, the need for which have come to light during the last 12 months of operation.
9. The draft revised Allocation Scheme can be found at Appendix 1. Proposed changes to the Scheme are highlighted on that document and are explained in detail in the remainder of this report.
10. Should the Scheme be approved by Council on 28th March 2018, the changes will take effect for both new and existing applicants from 1st April 2018.

Applicants who do not qualify to be on the housing register

Homeless Acceptances

11. Applicants who do not satisfy the local connection criteria are currently disqualified from joining the Council's housing register, unless there are exceptional circumstances why they should be exempted from such a requirement.
12. It is proposed that this requirement is removed for those who are owed the full housing duty by this Council under the Housing Act 1996. The applicants excluded by this requirement includes those who have fled domestic violence. The current position is unlawful as it is a legal requirement that homeless applicants should be given reasonable preference irrespective of local connection.
13. Furthermore, where the Council owes the full housing duty to applicants who do not satisfy the local connection criteria, this has resulted in these applicants remaining in temporary accommodation, at a cost to the Council for extended periods. This is because the Council has not been able to discharge the housing duty through an offer of social housing until a local connection has been acquired. There are currently 2 households who may benefit from this amendment.

Applicants aged 55 and over and Retirement and Extra Care Schemes

14. Applicants who do not satisfy the local connection criteria are disqualified from joining the Council's housing register. A further amendment is proposed to the current Housing Allocation scheme to add exemption from disqualification for applicants aged 55+ because of a local connection, for those who wish to be considered for Sheltered, Retirement and Extra Care Schemes. Such applicants will only be allowed to bid for such properties. They will be placed in Band D and will have less priority than those who do have a local connection. The policy rationale for this is to facilitate letting hard-to-let sheltered accommodation whilst ensuring that those who satisfy the local connection criteria are not disadvantaged. It will also enable Extra Care scheme vacancies to be taken up by applicants from the wider West Sussex area if there is no one from Mid Sussex who needs the vacancy. This will assist in relieving pressures on the West Sussex care budget. The care element in Extra Care is block commissioned by West Sussex.

Bidding

Homeless Acceptances and number of bids

15. The Scheme currently restricts the number of bids applicants can make to 3 per fortnightly bidding cycle.
16. It is proposed that we increase the number of bids permitted for applicants in temporary accommodation where Council owes the full housing duty under the Housing Act 1996, from 3 to unlimited.
17. The policy change rationale is to afford such applicants the best chance of making a successful bid and to move on from temporary accommodation as soon as possible.

18. It is acknowledged there may be minimal impact from this change as the number of available properties is the main reason that restricts bids as opposed to the number of bids allowed. However it is still proposed to make this change so that advantage can be taken to bid on more than 3 properties when the opportunity presents. This will help to reduce the time applicants currently spend in temporary accommodation and reduce the cost of temporary accommodation.

Homeless Acceptances and auto/direct bids

19. The Scheme currently provides that where the applicant is homeless and is owed a full housing duty under the Housing Act 1996, they have 12 weeks from the date the statutory duty was accepted during which the applicant is able to bid freely for properties. Within the 12 week time limit, applicants who successfully bid for a home may reject an offer of a tenancy without any penalty. After the 12 week time limit has expired, the Homemove Team and the Council's Housing Needs Team may make Direct Bids on their behalf.
20. It is proposed in future to allow for Direct and Auto Bidding for applicants to whom the Council owes the full housing duty and who are in temporary accommodation. This will run in tandem with any bids made by the applicants and will apply during the 12 week time limit for free bidding.
21. This amendment is proposed to ensure that such applicants do not miss out on opportunities to successfully bid for a home should they forget to bid and to facilitate the move on from temporary accommodation as soon as possible.

Policy Context

22. A sound housing allocation scheme contributes to meeting the Council's aim to deliver opportunity and quality of life for all. Having a fair and transparent scheme that helps prevent homelessness and promote choice is also an integral part of the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategies and Tenancy Strategy.

Other Options Considered

23. Any options considered are set out in the report.

Financial Implications

24. The proposed amendments to the Housing Allocation scheme may result in a saving on the Council's on temporary accommodation costs.

Risk Management Implications

25. There is always a risk that when changes are made to allocation schemes some unintended consequences arise. Any such impacts will be identified through the regular quarterly review of the Allocation Scheme, and options to address any such issues would be brought before this Committee.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

26. Changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme have been the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment. None of the proposals contained in this report will reduce the priority for social housing that is currently given to any protected group.
27. The implementation of the allocation scheme is regularly monitored, and this will enable us to keep the impact of all of these changes under review.

Other Material Implications

28. None

Background Papers

29. None.