

8. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME

REPORT OF: Judy Holmes, Assistant Chief Executive
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Council
29 March 2016

Purpose of Report

1. Following its endorsement by the Scrutiny Committee for Community, Housing and Planning at its meeting on 7th March, to seek Council's approval of a revised Housing Allocation Scheme.

Summary

2. Following the implementation from 1st April 2016 of a revised Housing Allocation Scheme that was agreed by Council on 23rd March 2016, the need for a number of further revisions has arisen.
3. This report sets out amendments that cover the following aspects of the current Housing Allocation Scheme.
 - Privacy Notice
 - Applicants who do not qualify to be on the housing register
 - Care Leavers without a local connection
 - Applicants in supported housing who are ready to move on
 - Accessible housing – special rules
 - Armed Forces Personnel – special rules
4. In addition, a number of minor textual amendments have been made to some paragraphs to clarify, but not change, the meaning.

Recommendation

5. **Council is recommended to approve the revised Housing Allocation Scheme at Appendix 1 to take effect from April 2017.**

Background

6. Local authorities may allocate affordable homes only in accordance with their adopted Housing Allocation Scheme.
7. A review of the Scheme provides an opportunity to make minor amendments, the need for which have come to light during the last 12 months of operation.
8. 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.
9. Should the Scheme be approved by Council, the changes will take effect for both new and existing applicants from April 2017.

Privacy Notice

10. It has become necessary to add a Privacy Notice to the Scheme to advise applicants that the Council may share their personal data internally and with other organisations as allowed by law. We also need to advise applicants that we may get information about them from, or give information to, certain third parties to prevent or detect crime or fraud or protect public funds, including government departments, local authorities, private sector companies and credit reference agencies. We need also to advise applicants that we may obtain information about them from social media.

Applicants who do not qualify to be on the housing register

11. Affinity Sutton tenants are currently disqualified from joining the Council's housing register as their landlord manages all transfer applications from its tenants in Mid Sussex and has opted out of the Council's Common Housing Register Partnership.
12. The Scheme currently exempts from disqualification Affinity Sutton tenants who need housing that is suitable for those using a wheelchair or those tenants needing Extra Care housing.
13. It is proposed that we extend this exemption to those needing to move into supported housing. This is expected to affect less than 5 Affinity Sutton tenants a year.

Care Leavers without a local connection

14. Young people leaving care who wish to be accommodated in Mid Sussex are currently allowed to join the Council's housing register only if they meet the local connection criteria set out in the Scheme, unless there are exceptional circumstances why they should be exempted from such a requirement.
15. It is proposed that we remove this requirement for those care leavers who are leaving WSCC care and who wish to be accommodated in Mid Sussex. This is expected to affect less than 5 care leavers a year.
16. This anticipates a provision in the Homelessness Reduction Bill currently making its way through Parliament which will deem that care leavers who become homeless have an automatic local connection with all District and Borough councils that fall within the area of the local authority that is responsible for them under the Children Act 1989.

Applicants in supported housing who are ready to move on

17. The Scheme currently gives additional priority to those who are ready to move on from supported housing into general needs housing.
18. It is proposed that we extend this to those who are ready to move on from a mental health hospital into the community. This is intended to avoid such people being discharged into a homeless situation where the hospital is prepared to delay discharge in the interest of sustaining the patient's well-being. This is expected to affect less than 5 patients in mental health hospitals a year.

Accessible housing – special rules

19. Homes that are suitable for full-time wheelchair users are currently prioritised for applicants with a suitable mobility need who are in bands A, B or C. If no suitable applicant is found in these bands then other applicants are considered, with priority

cascaded down the bands even where the applicant does not have a need for a wheelchair suitable home.

20. It is proposed in future that priority will be extended to applicants with a suitable mobility need who are in Band D, before considering applicants without such needs. Extending the priority to such applicants in band D will ensure that a wheelchair adapted home is more likely to go to someone who can make use of it.
21. There are currently 17 applicants with this level of mobility need in band D who could benefit from this amendment.

Armed Forces Personnel – special rules

22. The Scheme currently gives bids from Armed Forces Personnel priority over bids from other applicants in their band if they are in bands A, B, or C.
23. It is proposed to extend this priority to Armed Forces Personnel who are in band D. There are currently 9 applicants in band D who would benefit from this amendment.

Policy Context

24. 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 our Housing and Homelessness Strategies and Tenancy Strategy.

Other Options Considered

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

Financial Implications

26. None.

Risk Management Implications

27. 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

28. 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.
29. 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

30. None

Background Papers

31. None.