



LSC: 18th January 2023

CABINET: 24th January 2023

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
12th January 2023

Report of: Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing & Resources

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Pryce-Roberts

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SUBJECT: DRAFT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider and agree the Housing Allocations Policy subject to statutory consultation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

2.1 That the Draft Allocations Policy attached at Appendix 1 of the report be approved for consultation.

2.2 That the Head of Housing, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, be given delegated authority to make minor updates and changes as required to this policy following public consultation, and to implement and deliver the policy.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3.1 That the contents of the policy be considered by the committee.

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The Housing Allocations Policy was last updated in 2018. Since then, the Policy has provided a fair and transparent way of allocating housing. Whilst there are no

significant changes proposed in terms of assessing housing need the revised Draft Policy aims to make the best use of council housing stock, and address issues associated with the increased level of homelessness.

- 4.2 The Draft Allocations Policy, attached at Appendix 1, sets out the criteria for acceptance onto the Councils Housing Register and also the priority band in which applicants should be placed.
- 4.3 The Draft Policy will be subject to external consultation for a period of 12 weeks. A copy of the Draft Policy will be available on the Councils website and views will be sought from both Homefinder applicants and members of the public. Copies of the Draft Policy will also be sent to our RSL partners and other agencies such as Lancashire County Council Social Care, Liberty Centre, Birchwood Centre.
- 4.4 Prior to formulating the draft policy a consultation took place with applicants on the Housing Register and those who had been rehoused by the Council in the past two years.

5.0 HIGHLIGHTS FROM CONSULTATION

- 5.1 64.4% thought that single people should be able to bid on 2 bedroom properties
- 5.2 Participants believed that the current ineligibility criteria around those owing debts to the Council, damaging Council property, previously purchasing through Right to Buy, owner occupiers, or being guilty of Anti Social Behaviour are fair.
- 5.3 Respondents were asked to rank the factors they felt are most important when allocating a home:

OPTIONS AVG.	RANK
Assisting those suffering with domestic abuse	3.47
Housing homeless families in the area	3.86
Moving for medical purposes (adapted or level access housing)	5.09
Housing homeless single people or couples.	5.82
Those needing to move closer to family or friends for support due to a medical condition	6.94
Assisting ex armed forces personnel with suitable homes	6.98
Those living in overcrowded situations	7.39
Victims of Anti Social Behaviour	7.41
Those living in poor quality private rented housing	7.78
Those renting privately who have been served a notice to quit	8.44
Those in financial difficulties	8.91
Families with young children living in upper floor flats/maisonettes	9.46
Moving into first tenancies (from family home or currently staying with	9.51
Those living in a suitable home but who would like to move to a different area	12.03

- 5.4 58.9% of respondents did not feel that it was fair to give increased priority to those applicants who were working.
- 5.5 64.4% of applicants felt that it was fair that families with young children should be considered for houses before adult households.
- 5.6 63% felt that once housed there should be a time limit before tenants can reapply for an alternative property.

6.0 SUMMARY OF MAIN CHANGES

6.1 Homelessness

Whilst the Homeless Reduction Act came into force in April 2018 the impact of the additional duties placed on local authorities has not been fully felt until now. In addition, the Domestic Abuse Act widened the definition of the homelessness 'priority need' category creating additional pressures on our Homelessness services. The number of homelessness presentations has increased by 48% in the first 2 quarters of 2022 compared with same period in 2018.

The use of Temporary accommodation has also increased significantly as has the average time in people need to stay in temporary accommodation before they are find a home.

Number of Temporary Accommodation Placements & Average Stay by Year

Year	Number of Placements in Temporary Accommodation	Average stay in Temporary Accommodation – in Days
2018	22	54
2019	23	73
2020	77	60
2021	50	79
2022	40	97 (as at Nov 22)
Grand Total	212	

It is therefore critical that the Allocations Policy be updated to respond to these emerging challenges. The customer feedback exercised echoed that housing homeless families should be an important factor to be considered when letting homes, second only to those fleeing domestic abuse.

The revised Draft Policy includes the following key changes for consideration:

Applicants in one of the following groups will be placed into Band B High Priority:

- Statutory homeless applicants accepted as being owed the main housing duty
- Applicants who are homeless and owed the Relief duty

- Applicants who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days and are owed the Prevention duty and in priority need will be placed into Band B

To ensure that Homeless persons are given more priority than other High Need applicants, for example those in Band B for overcrowding, it is suggested that Homeless applicants meeting the above criteria will be awarded a Plus Status. During the short-listing process applicants with the enhanced 'Plus' status will appear above those applicants with the same level of housing need; i.e. in the same band who are not owed any Homelessness duty.

In addition, whilst applicants assessed as being owed the Homelessness Prevention Duty will be expected to actively make bids against suitable properties, it is proposed that applicants assessed as being owed a homelessness Relief Duty or those where a statutory decision has been issued finding them to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need and owed the 'main housing duty' will be made an offer of accommodation through Direct Matching. It is anticipated that this will reduce the numbers needing to be placed into temporary accommodation or where this is unavoidable will keep the length of stay to a minimum.

6.2 Urgent need

Band A priority is awarded where an applicant demonstrates an urgent need to move, at present an applicant can retain this priority status indefinitely. To encourage applicants in Band A to actively bid for accommodation which addresses their housing need rather than to wait for their ideal property the Draft Allocations Policy introduces a 6 month time limit. The Housing Options team will monitor bidding activity and where no suitable properties have been advertised in the time period, an applicant will retain Band A priority for a further 6 months.

6.3 Income and Asset Limits

Whilst feedback from consultation was that existing Income and Asset rules were fair, given cost of living pressures the threshold levels have been reviewed. Applicants who earn over the Income threshold or have savings or equity over the Assets limits would not normally be considered eligible to join the Housing Register.

It is proposed to increase the income threshold from £40,000 to one third of the average house price in West Lancashire, at current levels this would be £50,000. This level will be reviewed annually using ONS house price data.

It is proposed that the saving/asset threshold be increased from £60,000 to £80,000.

6.4 Transfers

To create more sustainable tenancies applicants and will not normally qualify to re-join the housing register for 24 months from the start of their tenancy. In

situations where applicants have experienced a change in their circumstances or have an urgent need to move their circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis.

6.5 Economic and Community Contribution

The current policy awards a Plus status to applicants meeting Economic or Community Contribution criteria. Applicants may be eligible for the Economic/Community Contribution Award if they are working, in training, or volunteering subject to conditions.

2% of applicants on the current Housing Register have Plus status on grounds of Community Contribution and 12% on the basis that they were working. Whilst only 14% of the Housing Register meet the criteria, 25% of all lettings are made to those with a Plus status, this rises to 40% for allocation of family houses.

Applicants who are working and have the Plus status awarded to their application are rehoused into general needs accommodation in an average of 266 days. The average for the those without the plus status is 463 days.

This criterion places those applicants who are unable to work or volunteer due to a disability, caring responsibility or other characteristic at a disadvantage. In 32% of applications the main applicant has identified as having a disability.

In addition, as only 19% of Homeless applications in 2021/22 stated that they were not on benefits the criterion does not support those in most urgent need of accommodation.

To ensure fairness and avoid disadvantaging those applicants who are unable to work and who have no other housing options available to it is proposed to remove this criterion.

6.6 For the purposes of assessing overcrowding, households with an expectant mother will now be treated as though the child has been born at 30 weeks of pregnancy. This aims to support expectant parents in securing suitable accommodation prior to the birth of their child.

6.7 As the Council has limited availability of 1 bedroom flats, applicants on the list for 1 bedrooms are having to wait longer to be housed. To address this the revised Draft Policy will allow single people and couples assessed as eligible for 1 bedroom to bid on both 1 and 2 bed flats, maisonettes or bungalows, however this would be subject to an affordability assessment

7.0 IMPLEMENTATION

7.1 Implementing the Draft Policy once approved will require a number of actions. Firstly, the existing list of housing register applicants will need to be re-assessed

in line with the new Policy as some applicants will be impacted by the changes. Additionally, the Choice Based Lettings system will need to be updated.

- 7.2 Subject to approval the new Policy will take effect following wider consultation and consideration of any comments received. All affected applicants will have to be informed individually of any changes to their application and would need sufficient time to exercise a right to appeal against the decision.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This Policy formalises our approach to supporting tenants and residents who need housing, ensuring we provide good quality homes to those in most housing need.

9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are some financial resource implications arising from this report in respect of updating the Choice Based Lettings software, a growth bid has been submitted.

10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 The actions referred to in this report are covered by the scheme of delegation to officers and any necessary changes have been made in the relevant risk registers.

11.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Policy aims to promote the wellbeing of our tenants and residents by providing help and support to those who are homeless or need more suitable accommodation.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report

Appendices

1. Draft Allocations Policy
2. Equality Impact Assessment

3. Minute of Executive Overview & Scrutiny committee – 12 January 2023
4. 4. Minute of Landlord Services Committee (Cabinet Working Group – 18 January 2023