

CABINET

4th December 2019

Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy Permission to Consult

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Shirley Webb
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Judith Willis – Head of Community Services
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor Consulted	No
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report provides the results of the consultation which took place from the 1st June 2019 until the 12th July 2019 on the proposed changes to the Allocations Policy and presents a finalised Allocations Policy for approval. The report sets out the changes and the responses are shown as a percentage at the end of each point.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet **RESOLVE**:-

- 2.1 That the consultation responses are noted and all the changes to the Allocation Policy are agreed and the Policy (appendix 1) is adopted.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 Changes to the Home Choice Plus system will be split across the six Home Choice partners. Officers can confirm that this cost can be met by existing budgets.

Legal Implications

- 3.2 The Council is expected to give due consideration to changes to the Homelessness Code of Guidance and to implement statutory guidance. Recent changes to guidance need to be incorporated into the Allocations Policy.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.3 Local Housing Authorities (LHA) are required by s.166A of the Housing Act 1996 to have an allocation scheme for determining priorities and for defining the procedures to be followed in allocating social housing

accommodation and they must allocate in accordance with that scheme.

3.4 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017) enhanced the Council's duties for applicants who were facing homelessness by preventing or relieving homelessness at an earlier stage. There are now up to three stages in this process which depending on the customer's circumstances may include:

- 56 day prevention duty
- 56 relief duty where the customer is actually homeless
- Full Homelessness Duty where a decision about what further duty the applicant is made.

Changes

3.5 **Relief Duty** - those applicants who the Council is satisfied it has a duty to relieve homelessness (s.189B) and the Council has validated as being unintentionally homeless and has a priority need will be placed into the Priority Band. 87% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with this change.

3.6 **Prevention Duty Additional Waiting Time:** The allocations policy will give prevention cases an additional six months waiting time so they are prioritised within the band. This recognises the requirement to continue to assist other groups in housing need whilst also giving some priority to those that we owe the prevention duty to. 89% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with this change.

3.7 **Local Connection Qualifying Criteria:** Where a property has been secured through a section 106 agreement that requires specific residency criteria, allocations to these properties will be exempt from the qualification criteria. 88% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with this change.

3.8 **Reduced Banding:** Reduced banding is applied where applicants are considered to have sufficient income or equity to resolve their own housing need. The thresholds for this were reviewed and the income level increased from £35,000 to £38,000, which is broadly based on an increase at RPI for the last 5 years. In addition, the entry price for a one bedroom flat has increased so for those applicants unable to get a mortgage and on a fixed income (e.g. pensioners) it is proposed to have a maximum of £95k for equity / savings / capital which will give a more realistic price for someone needing to purchase a property where they are unable to obtain a mortgage e.g. an older person or

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pensioner. 91% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with this change.

- 3.9 **Children in flats:** All families, with children under 10, without a garden will be placed in the gold band. 82% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with this change.
- 3.10 The treatment of homeless households with a terminal illness or victims of domestic abuse in relation to banding definitions will be expanded to align with statutory guidance.
- 3.11 In respect of armed forces, divorced and separated spouses or civil partners of Services personnel who are required to leave Ministry of Defence accommodation will be exempt from the Local Connection criteria.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.12 An equality impact assessment screening has been undertaken and this shows no detrimental effect. There is a positive affect for those families with young children and those with a disability.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 There is a requirement to have an Allocation Policy in place and to revise the policy from time to time in line with statutory guidance to avoid the risk posed by a legal challenge. These changes to this policy and its operation mitigates against that risk.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Home Choice Plus Allocation Policy 2019

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet report dated 6th March 2019

7. KEY

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