

TITLE	Housing Allocations Policy 2021
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 30 September 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing and Deputy Leader - Cllr John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To obtain Executive approval to consult on the draft policy and delegate authority to the Director of Place and Growth and Executive Member for Finance and Housing to adopt and implement the policy following consultation.

This policy will:

- Reduce homelessness, rough sleeping and overcrowding.
- Help applicants in housing need to find suitable accommodation.
- Reduce the use of temporary accommodation.
- Prioritise applicants, so that available housing is let to those in most need.
- Make best use of the housing stock available.
- Support sustainable communities.
- Meet legal and good practice standards.
- Ensure equal opportunities.
- Work in partnership with other housing providers.
- Provide a high quality service to customers.
- To ensure that every customer is treated fairly and consistently irrespective of race and ethnicity, disability, gender/gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age.
- Support move-on and assist independence.
- Manage expectations.
- Support regeneration decants.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) agrees the draft policy to go out to consultation. The proposed external consultation period is six weeks.
- 2) delegates authority to the Director of Place and Growth in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Housing to adopt and implement the policy following consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current Allocations Policy was adopted in November 2014 and amended in March 2015 in line with statutory guidance. This policy requires updating to reflect new legislation, to take account of shifts in demand and changes to ways of working. We committed to a review of the Allocations Policy in our Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024.

Housing plays a huge role in the health, environmental and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the borough. Through this policy, we will help to ensure that we address our housing need, especially given the economic and social impacts of Covid-19.

Summary of key changes:

1. Updated banding scheme to reflect current need.
2. Introduction of Band 5 to reduce congestion in Band 4 and to prioritise between reduced preference groups.
3. Revised refusals process to make the best use of available stock.
4. Local connection test to support Wokingham residents.
5. Incentivise a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.
6. Band 2 prioritisation to be reviewed quarterly to respond to need and corporate priorities.
7. Revised approach to 'areas of choice' to ensure we are offering homes to those in most need.
8. Enabling care leaver reciprocal agreements.
9. Key worker definition extended to include those providing an essential service to the local economy and earning under £30,000 per annum per person, dependent on the scheme.
10. Detailed guidance on assessing medical priority.
11. Clarity of process for applicants with rent arrears and housing related debt.
12. Provide clarity for extra care and supported housing allocations.

Please refer to the Summary Paper for further details.

If consultation is agreed by the Executive then Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public will have the opportunity to respond to a consultation on the draft policy prior to adoption and implementation. The consultation will be sent out across the Council, to all Members, the Parish and Town Councils, the RP Partnership, TLIP, MHCLG, Homes England, partners and agencies and local charities. It was also be publicised via a press release and our social media.

If the Executive approve the proposal to consult on the draft policy, we will carry out consultation on the draft policy until the end of November 2021. We anticipate adoption of the new policy in January 2022, with phased implementation to April 2022.

BACKGROUND

Every local authority is required to have a Housing Allocations Policy (sometimes referred to as an allocations scheme) in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 (Part VI) as amended. This policy determines how Wokingham Borough Council will allocate to available social housing stock in the borough and set priorities between applicants.

The current Allocations Policy was adopted in November 2014 and amended in March 2015 in line with statutory guidance. In 2020, the Economic Prosperity and Place Team carried out analysis on data from the Council's Housing Register, held round table discussions to understand issues and options, and identified a series of recommendations. Following on from this, the draft Housing Allocations Policy has been developed by both strategic and operational housing colleagues and in collaboration with Andy Gale (a sector expert on allocations and homelessness).

In developing this policy, the Council has followed and fully considered the following housing legislation, regulations, statutory guidance, and strategies:

- 1) The Housing Act 1996, Part 6 as amended by Localism Act 2011 (England)
- 2) The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- 3) Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local housing Authorities in England (2012, DCLG) "the Code";
- 4) Providing social housing for local people: Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (DCLG, December 2013) "Supplementary Code".
- 5) Improving access to social housing for members of the armed forces: Statutory guidance issued by MHCLG June 2020
- 6) Plus the following statutory regulations:
 - a) Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997, SI 1997/483;
 - b) Allocation of Housing (England) Regulations 2002, SI 2002/3264;
 - c) Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/1294 and all subsequent amendments
 - d) Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012/1869;
 - e) Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012/2989.
 - f) The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015

- g) 'The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (SI 2019/861)'
- h) Right to Move guidance (DCLG, 2015)
- i) Social Housing for Victims of Domestic Abuse in Refuges or other Types of Temporary Accommodation, guidance (MHCLG, 2018)
- j) Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities (MHCLG, 2018)

In framing our allocations scheme this policy has had regard to the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Housing Strategy, and Tenancy Strategy as well as the Equality Act 2010.

BUSINESS CASE

As of the end of March 2021, there were 2,086 households on the council's housing register for social housing in the borough. This is a significant increase from the same time last year, when 1,681 households were on the register. This includes 46 accepted homeless households and 109 households owed a duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act. This also includes 38 households occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and 66 households who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability.

In relation to the bands applicant are placed in, from Band 1 to Band 4, with Band 1 being the highest priority and Band 4 the lowest. It is worth noting that turnover in Bands 1-3 is higher. At 31st March 2021, the vast majority of those on the register were in Band 4:

- Band 1 – 137
- Band 2 – 106
- Band 3 – 340
- Band 4 – 1503

The property size requirements of applications as at 31st March 2021 breakdowns as follows:

- One bedroom – 1,091
- Two bedroom - 506
- Three bedroom - 376
- More than three bedrooms – 113

Alongside the increase in residents joining the housing register, there has been a significant increase in homeless presentations over the last two years. The table below shows homeless presentations from 2011/12 to 2020/21.

Year	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Presented	50	81	81	141	236	196	178	248	322	318

As at September 2021, we have 100 households in temporary accommodation awaiting rehousing.

The current cost per night for the provision of emergency accommodation (B&B) is £2,771. Costs have been rising due to increased demand.

Month	B&B total monthly cost
April	£72,898
May	£79,520
June	£82,632
July	£86,319
August	c.£90-95k (to be confirmed)

In 2020/21, a total of 391 new allocations were successfully made to affordable homes (both WBC and RP stock).

During 2020/21 we had 187 completions of new affordable homes in the borough, which consisted of 72 social rented properties, 112 shared ownership and 3 intermediate/affordable rent. Whilst we were anticipating over 300 completions at the start of 2020/21, the pandemic has had an impact in terms of shortages of staff and building materials. Defects have also been an issue meaning a large number of predicted completions have now slipped into 2021/22.

- 2020/21 - 187
- 2019/20 - 465
- 2018/19 - 365
- 2017/18 - 482

In order to address our housing need, particularly in light of changing demand due to the pandemic and to reflect changes to legislation and best practice, the following key changes are proposed to the allocations scheme in the borough:

1. Updated banding scheme to reflect current need.
2. Introduction of Band 5 to reduce congestion in Band 4 and to prioritise between reduced preference groups.
3. Revised refusals process to make the best use of available stock.
4. Local connection test to support Wokingham residents.
5. Incentivise a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.
6. Band 2 prioritisation to be reviewed quarterly to respond to need and corporate priorities.
7. Revised approach to 'areas of choice' to ensure we are offering homes to those in most need.
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9. Key worker definition extended to include those providing an essential service to the local economy and earning under £30,000 per annum per person, dependent on the scheme.
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11. Clarity of process for applicants with rent arrears and housing related debt.
12. Provide clarity for extra care and supported housing allocations.

Please refer to the Summary Paper for further details of each proposal and a policy locator to direct you to the relevant pages within the full policy document.

We expect to achieve the following in adopting the new Allocations Policy:

- Reduce homelessness, rough sleeping and overcrowding.
- Help applicants in housing need to find suitable accommodation.
- Reduce the use of temporary accommodation.
- Prioritise applicants, so that available housing is let to those in most need.
- Make best use of the housing stock available.
- Support sustainable communities.
- Meet legal and good practice standards.
- Ensure equal opportunities.
- Work in partnership with other housing providers.
- Provide a high quality service to customers.
- To ensure that every customer is treated fairly and consistently irrespective of race and ethnicity, disability, gender/gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age.
- Support move-on and assist independence.
- Manage expectations.
- Support regeneration decants.

Next Steps

If the Executive approve the proposal to consult on the draft policy, we will carry out consultation on the draft policy until the end of November 2021. We anticipate adoption of the new policy in January 2022, with phased implementation to April 2022.

We will also develop a lettings plan to support the allocations policy. A comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment will be prepared and published as part of the consultation documentation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	This policy will be resourced through existing funding within the Council’s MTFP and the HRA. (Further cost analysis work will be completed following consultation; however it is expected that this will be funded through existing funding in the MTFP and HRA.)		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other Financial Information

The financial approvals needed to enact this policy will be sought and contained within the annual budget setting process.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public will have the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft policy. The consultation will be made available via the

Council's website, with associated press releases, invitations to respond and social media push.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken. A comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment will be prepared and published as part of the consultation documentation.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*
It is not anticipated that the Housing Allocations Policy will have an adverse effect on the environment or climate change.

List of Background Papers
Draft Housing Allocations Policy – Enclosure 1.
Summary Paper – Enclosure 2.

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