

Allocations Policy – summary paper.

Overview

Our current Allocations Policy was adopted in November 2014 and amended in March 2015 in line with statutory guidance. Our current banding scheme is included at Appendix One for reference. This policy requires updating to reflect new legislation, to take account of shifts in demand and changes to ways of working.

In 2020, the 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 initial recommendations. Following on from this, a draft Housing Allocations Policy has been developed by both strategic and operational housing colleagues and in collaboration with Andy Gale (sector expert on allocations and homelessness).

The Executive Report seeks approval to begin the consultation process 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.

Key Changes

No.	Key Change	Detail	Policy locator
1.	New Banding Scheme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decant (WBC stock only) added specifically to Band 1.• Care leavers with housing need and agreement from panel moved to Band 2. All others to be in Band 4 pending meeting criteria for Band 2.• Prevention and relief duty cases into Band 3.• Non-priority homeless into Band 4.• Domestic abuse victims added to Band 1 (new legislation).• Foster carers in accordance with protocol into Band 3.• Move on from non-permanent supported accommodation that is commissioned by the Council, as part of an agreed move on pathway into Band 2.	See Appendix Two below. Page 23-25 of draft policy.
2.	Introducing Band Five.	To reduce congestion in Band 4 and to prioritise between reduced preference groups. Band 5 to include:	See Appendix Two below. Page 29-35 draft policy.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of area applicants (particularly those working but not living in the borough, or who have family or caring responsibilities in the borough). • Owner occupiers. • Finances preclude priority. • Where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances in order to qualify for higher priority. • Former tenants who have been evicted for rent arrears and/or ASB. 	
3.	Refusals.	<p>If an applicant refuses a reasonable offer of accommodation within an area of their choice that is suitable for their bedroom need, their application will be removed from the Housing Register.</p> <p>This is to tackle the problem of applicants refusing properties without reasonable grounds.</p>	Page 18-20 draft policy.
4.	Local connection test	<p>In order to join Wokingham Borough Council's Housing Register, applicants will need to demonstrate that they have been resident in the borough for five consecutive years or more directly prior to the date of application, and that they are still resident in the borough at the point they receive an offer of accommodation.</p> <p>Exceptional cases can be considered.</p>	Page 9-10 draft policy.
5.	Incentivise a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.	<p>To offer accepted homeless applicants an incentive not to take up an offer of temporary accommodation should they be eligible for a placement. If both the council and the applicant agree, the applicant's banding priority will be increased by one level on the understanding that no temporary accommodation will be offered. For example, an applicant in Band Three will be placed into Band Two under this incentive. This incentive is not available to those who are not eligible for a temporary accommodation placement.</p>	Page 26 draft policy.

6.	Band Two prioritisation	<p>We recognise that all applicants in Band Two have been assessed as having an urgent need for housing and are prioritised above any other band except for the most exceptional cases in Band One.</p> <p>Allocations from within Band Two will not be made in date order. Instead, the Council will set and review the priority between the different groups within this band on a quarterly basis and publish a position statement. Applicants within each group will then be prioritised in date order as within other bands. When reviewing the priority between the different groups in Band Two, the Council will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive lettings. • Financial costs to the Council. • Estate regeneration. • Management reasons. • Corporate priorities. • Other relevant factors. 	Page 22 draft policy.
7.	Offers made to applicants in Bands One and Two and to those under statutory homeless duties are not required to be within an area of choice.	<p>Offers made to applicants in Band One are not required to be within an area of choice. If an applicant in Band One refuses a suitable offer of accommodation, they will lose this priority status and be placed into Band Five.</p> <p>If an applicant owed any of the statutory homelessness duties refuses a written offer of suitable social housing accommodation made through this policy, then the duty owed to them will be discharged and they will lose any priority status afforded to them because of that homeless duty owed. In these circumstances, the applicant will be placed into Band Five.</p> <p>Exceptional circumstances can be considered by a Senior Officer.</p>	Page 6-7 draft policy.
8.	Care leaver reciprocal.	The Council is willing to consider entering into reciprocal agreements with other local authorities in order to meet the needs of our care leavers.	Page 28 draft policy.

		If a Wokingham care leaver is accommodated in a social housing unit in another local authority area, that local authority may receive a reciprocal credit to place a young person in Wokingham Borough on the same terms, provided that both local authorities sign up to the reciprocal agreement in that case. This does not guarantee that such arrangements can be made.	
9.	Key Worker definition.	Policy provision to extend to include those providing an essential service to the local economy and earning under £30,000 per annum per person, dependent on the scheme.	Page 26-27 draft policy.
10.	Detailed guidance on assessing medical priority.	Included as Appendix 5 in the draft policy. Exceptional circumstances can be considered by a Senior Officer.	Page 27 draft policy. Appendix 5 draft policy.
11.	Process for applicants with rent arrears and housing related debt.	Applicants split into three groups: debts of £1-499, debts of £500 or more who have made arrangements to address the debt and debts of £500 or more who have not made any arrangements to address the debt. Exceptional circumstances can be considered by a Senior Officer.	Page 32-34 draft policy.
12.	Addition of Appendix 3 – Extra Care and Supported Housing.	To provide clarity for extra care and supported housing allocations. To include further details of LD allocations process once agreed.	Page 39 draft policy.

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.

Appendix One: Current Banding Scheme.

Allocating Social Housing – The Banding System Explained.			
Band One	Band Two	Band Three	Band Four
<p>EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES – MOST URGENT BAND.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory overcrowding (not just overcrowding, but extreme situations with guidance from Environmental Health). • Prohibition/Demolition/Closing Order (Environmental Health guidance & where it is not possible to remedy). • Serious property failure (Social Housing). • Under-occupying by two bedrooms or more (social housing where the vacancy comes back for re-let only). • Urgent health or disability needs (Medical A). • Urgent social or welfare needs (Social A). • Homeless (full duty). 	<p>Under-occupying by 1 or more bedroom (social housing).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move-on from supported housing. • Care leavers in housing need. • Overcrowding by 2 or more bedrooms short. • Urgent unsatisfactory housing (Environmental Health defined). • Compound needs (2 or more categories from Band Three). • Members of the Armed and Reserve Forces who fall into one of the groups below: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service. 2. Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services family accommodation following death of their partner. 3. Serving members of the Armed Forces leaving service accommodation through no fault of their own and comprise a family with children or fall into one of the priority groups defined by the Housing Act 1996. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant health or disability needs (Medical B). • Significant social or welfare needs (Social B). • Unsatisfactory housing (Environmental Health defined). • Overcrowding by one bedroom short. • Insecure tied accommodation. • Insecure private rented accommodation. • Homeless (not full duty cases). • Members of the Armed Forces leaving service accommodation through no fault of their own on discharge. • Former members of the Armed Forces with housing need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No housing need/adequately housed. • Sharing but not overcrowded. • Out of area. • Owner occupiers. • Finances preclude priority. • Those where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances in order to qualify for higher priority.

Appendix Two: Proposed Banding Scheme

Band	Criteria
One	<p>EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES – MOST URGENT ONLY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants fleeing domestic abuse that have been assessed by MARAC as needing to move urgently for the safety and security of themselves and/or any dependent children. • Urgent health or disability needs (Medical A). • Urgent social or welfare needs (Social A). • Property condition presents a serious risk to life or presents an immediate threat of serious injury: fire, flood, extreme overcrowding (determined by Environmental Health), Category 1 Hazard with Prohibition Order resulting in permanent loss of accommodation in the private rented sector, or serious property failure (social housing only) resulting in no access to a bath or shower, a toilet, cooking facilities, running hot water supplies, electric/gas needed for essential activities without remedy within a reasonable timeframe. • Demolition or Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) cases. Decant required (WBC stock only). Allocations to be made in accordance with Decent Policy.
Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless applicants (main duty accepted under S193 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended) when the S189B Relief Duty ends, including Wokingham care leavers in housing need and rough sleepers covered by this legislation. • Wokingham care leavers in housing need, with agreement from the Young Person’s Housing Panel, and completed tenancy training. • Move on from non-permanent supported accommodation that is commissioned by the Council, as part of an agreed move on pathway (for example, SIL schemes). • Under-occupying by two bedrooms or more (social housing only, where the void comes back for re-let). • Overcrowded by 2 or more bedrooms. • Urgent unsatisfactory housing. The property poses a Category 1 hazard under the Health and Safety Fitness Rating, which cannot be resolved within 6 months and poses a considerable risk to the applicant’s health. Only applies to cases where the household is not able to resolve their own housing problem. • Members of the Armed or Reserve Forces who fall into one of the groups below: • Serving or former members of the Armed or Reserve Forces who needs to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services family accommodation following death of their partner. • Serving members of the Armed Forces leaving service accommodation through no fault of their own and comprise a family with children or fall into one of the priority groups defined by the Housing Act 1996. • Applicants owed a duty by Adult Social Services under the Care Act 2014 / Mental Health Act 1983/2007 who have been assessed by the housing team as being ready to move onto independent living and have an appropriate support package in place.
Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants owed a S195 Prevention Duty or a S189B Relief Duty. • Significant health or disability needs (Medical B). • Significant social or welfare needs (Social B). • Unsatisfactory housing (Environmental Health defined). • Overcrowded by one bedroom. • Insecure tied accommodation. • Members of the Armed Forces leaving service accommodation through no fault of their own on discharge without dependents. • Former members of the Armed Forces with housing need. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis. • Foster carers with approval from Children's Services, where there is a need to move to a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child (max.4 bedrooms). • Under-occupying by 1 or more bedrooms (social housing), including accepted tenancy successors.
Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless households who are non-priority (not accepted main duty cases) and/or have been found to be intentionally homeless. • Privately renting and adequately housed. • Sharing facilities including kitchen and bathroom, and adequately housed. • Wokingham care leavers who do not meet criteria for Band 1 now.
Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of area applicants (particularly those working but not living in the borough, or have family or caring responsibility). • Owner occupiers. • Finances preclude priority.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances in order to qualify for higher priority (see page 33 for more details).• Former tenants who have been evicted for rent arrears and/or ASB.
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