

Equality Analysis

Relevant Data, Research

The Council has used the data available from its current housing register as set out in the table below to assess the impact of the proposed changes to the Council's housing allocation policy on those with a protected characteristic.

As at the 20th September 2018, there were 3262 households registered on the Council's housing register. Of those the following information is known:

Age Groups	Numbers
40+	70
45+	266
55+	153
60+	175
65+	398

Ethnic Groups	Numbers
African	13
Asian	10
White Anglo	3131
Caribbean	4
European	60
Irish	3
Middle Eastern	4
Mixed	3
Oriental	7
Non White (Other)	19

Household Make Up	Numbers
Families (Not Single Parent)	1624
Single Parent Families	703

The Council is committed to ensuring that it monitors its compliance with its duties under the Equality Act 2010; in particular, it notes that there is a need to ensure that data is collected to enable the Council to identify how the provisions within its housing allocation policy are impacting on certain protected characteristic groups, particularly reference to gender, those disability and race (specific BME categories not restricted to colour).

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In assessing the potential equality implications, the Council will consider the impacts (both positive and negative) on the groups with protected characteristics and any mitigating actions to be taken, or where appropriate, the reason why a provision is the most proportionate means of achieving the Council's objectives.

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The aims and objectives of the Council's housing allocation policy are:

To ensure the allocation of social housing in a fair and transparent manner, with the aim of using the Council's scarce housing resources appropriately, and in particular, to enable the Council to meet:

- a. Its prevention and homelessness statutory duties;
- b. the housing needs of those that are most vulnerable;
- c. the need to allocate housing with reference to the prevailing housing conditions and needs within its district; and
- d. its statutory obligations as set out in Part VI of the Housing Act 1996

This strategy is for the benefit of all of the Council's residents as set out in the key objectives above but will need to be regularly monitored to ensure that residents with a protected characteristic are able to take advantage of the strategy's key objectives.

Consideration has been given to the following:

Online Application Process:

Age (elderly) and Disability (mental health issues):

The Council's objective in this provision is to provide for the efficient processing of applications for social housing within its district area. There is an indication that elderly applicants, particularly those who are aged 75+ will have the least access to internet facilities¹; however, the Council notes that age group will likely be seeking extra care housing and will have the support in place to ensure that online applications can be made. Furthermore, the Council has installed computers in both its main and satellite offices to provide for greater access to internet facilities. There are also free internet facilities in libraries and most elderly applicants will likely to have family or friends to assist them in making applications. The Housing Options team's contact details are accessible to members of the public and can be found on the allocation policy. The Housing Options team can be contacted for support or to make a referral to a support agency, such as Age UK who provide significant support to elderly applicants. Applicants aged 65 and over represent 12% of all applicants on the housing register. The Council recognises the need to monitor applications being made, and if necessary, will ensure that appropriate steps are taken if there is evidence of a decline in representation of applications from those in these age groups as compared to the current representation.

Whilst there is likely to be a neutral impact on those with a physical health disability (as they will still be able to access internet facilities at home and in public spaces (library and at the Council offices) it is likely that there will be a negative impact on those with mental health disabilities. However, as indicated above, the Housing Options team's contact details are accessible to members of the public and applicants can also be referred to an advice agency, such as Two Saints, and where appropriate, advocacy services through Solent Mind.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2017>

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Incentive to Work

On Women, Disability and Age (elderly and young)

The government has made clear that it wishes local authorities to provide incentives for applicants to work or make a positive contribution to the local community². The Council has introduced this provision to achieve this objective and whilst it recognises that there might be a negative impact on those with a disability, women and the elderly and young applicants (as they are less likely to be engaged in work), it is considered that by ensuring that this provision can be satisfied by those who are making a community contribution, for example by voluntary work, it is striking a proportionate balance between its identified objective and minimising the adverse impact on those with these protected characteristics. Further, the provision only relates to 10-20% of the Council's annual general needs allocations. The Council has recognised within the allocation policy that it will need to keep this provision under review to ensure compliance with its duties under the Equality Act 2010.³ The Council will monitor the impact of this provision on those who identify with these protected characteristics and if necessary, will take appropriate steps to ensure that equality of opportunity is maintained.

Local Connection

Race (including non-BME ethnicities) and Women:

Whilst the Council acknowledges that its local connection criteria will likely impact on those of a BME background (including travellers and those who arrived in the country as refugees) and women who are more likely to be fleeing domestic abuse and may need to relocate to an area to which they do not have a local connection, the local connection criteria for residence is set at only 2 years.

Further, local connection can be recognised through employment within the Council's district and the Council has set exceptions to those who will have to satisfy the local connection criteria; particularly those to whom the Council owes certain duties under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. Women fleeing domestic abuse will ordinarily fall within this category. The Council's approach is a proportionate means of enabling the Council to achieve the objective of promoting local priorities when allocating social housing within its district whilst minimising negative impacts on those who have these protected characteristics. Furthermore, the Council has a residual discretion as set out in the policy to enable it to dispense with any of the provisions of the policy in exceptional circumstances, and in particular, where failing to do so would be in breach of the Council's duties as contained in the Equality Act 2010⁴. Accordingly, when making decisions as to whether discretion should be exercised, the Council will be focused on the need to ensure compliance with its duties under the Equality Act 2010 to those who fall within these protected characteristic groups.

² Paragraph 4.27 of the Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local Housing Authorities in England.

³ Paragraph 6.2.2.3 (c) of the draft Housing Allocation Policy.

⁴ Paragraph 7.6 .2 of the draft Housing Allocation Policy.

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Further Action

The Council will need to collect full and accurate data for those who are applying to join its housing register and also for those being allocated accommodation. In particular, in relation to areas surrounding the Incentive to Work, Local Connection and Online Applications. It will also need to ensure that it undertakes an Equality Analysis whenever it sets Local Lettings Policies or it applies sensitive lettings provisions.