

PROPOSED HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY – OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following the Council's approval in December 2018 of the proposed new draft Housing Allocation Policy ("the Policy") a statutory consultation exercise commenced. The Policy set out proposed changes to the way the Council allocates social housing within the District. The proposed Allocation Policy can be viewed using the link below:

<http://www.newforest.gov.uk/allocationconsultation>

- 1.2 This report sets out the outcome of the consultation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Under s.166A (13) of the Housing Act 1996 before adopting, or making any alterations to a housing allocation scheme that reflects a major change in policy, the Council is required to:

- (a) send a copy of the draft policy, or proposed alterations, to every private registered provider of social housing and registered social landlord with which they have nomination rights; and
- (b) afford them with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals.

- 2.2 Under s.168 of the Act, the Council is required to take reasonable steps to bring the effects of the alteration to the attention of those who are likely to be affected by them. It is accepted good practice to give those who will be so affected an opportunity to comment on the proposed alterations before they are adopted.

3. CONSULTATION

3.1 Process

- 3.1.1 On 15 January 2019 the Council opened its consultation on the Policy. A consultation document containing a summary of the proposed changes, a link to the Policy and a questionnaire was made available on the Housing Section of the Council's website. A copy of the consultation document is attached at Appendix 1. The consultation ended at 5pm on 20 February 2019.

- 3.1.2 The following groups were also specifically invited to consult on the Policy:

- (a) All private registered providers of social housing with which the Council has nomination rights;
- (b) All current Homesearch applicants; and
- (c) Statutory, non-statutory agencies and organisations delivering services to vulnerable people in the District.

3.1.3 The Service Manager for Housing Options also visited the Job Centre Plus in Ringwood, a Care Leavers' Team Meeting and a Community Mental Health Team Meeting to promote the consultation. A presentation on the Policy was also given to the Tenant Involvement Group and Homelessness Multi-Agency Forum.

3.2 Outcome

3.2.1 There were 250 responses to the Council's consultation; 88.8% of responses were from current Homeseach applicants. Responses were also received from the following organisations:

- (a) Radian (private registered provider of social housing);
- (b) Ringwood Town Council;
- (c) New Milton Town Council
- (d) Together
- (e) Tenant's Involvement Group;
- (f) The Handy Trust Charity (Youth Service);
- (g) The You Trust; and
- (h) Two Saints

3.2.2 A summary of the responses received, including some of the comments made on the Policy and the Council's responses to them is attached at Appendix 2. The full responses to the consultation can be viewed at www.newforest.gov.uk/allocationconsultation

3.2.3 The consultation outcome showed the majority to be in support of the Policy; with 63.1% of respondents confirming that they believed it was correct for the Council to allocate scarce social housing with reference to an applicant's housing need and not only the time spent waiting for an allocation of housing.

4. FOLLOWING ADOPTION

4.1 After adopting a new housing allocation policy the Council will complete the procurement of a new IT system and begin a period of implementation to ensure the efficient re-registration of all applicants. During this period the Council has to notify all current housing register applicants of the change and the likely effect of it on their application. Applicants will be invited to re-apply to join the new housing register later in the year. Once an application is received it will be re-assessed in accordance with the provisions of the new allocation scheme. The re-assessment period will likely take 3-4 months.

4.2 During the period of implementation, the allocation of social housing to existing housing register applicants will continue based upon the current allocation policy, until the new register goes live. Shortly before the re-registration period commences, new applications will no longer be accepted on to the existing register. From this point new applications will be directed to apply to the new housing register. These applicants will not be able to bid for properties until the new register goes live. Any such applicant who is assessed as having an urgent need to move will be assisted separately.

4.3 As each applicant is re-registered they will be notified of their new band under the Policy. All applicants will have a statutory right to seek a review of the decision made on their application. A date for the commencement of the new register is likely to be in the autumn and every effort will be made to introduce this at the earliest opportunity.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The majority of respondents to the consultation have expressed support for the proposed changes to the way social housing is allocated in the District as contained in the Policy. Some comments were made about the impact of the Policy on those who are adequately housed in the private sector. The Policy needs to be read in conjunction with the Council's recently adopted Housing Strategy. In particular, the Council will be developing its own shared ownership scheme which will provide opportunities for residents who are renting in the private sector to get onto the property ladder.
- 5.2 Having considered the consultation responses it is not proposed that any changes should be made to the draft document that formed the basis for consultation. The Proposed Housing Allocation Policy is therefore attached as Appendix 4 to this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 In order to better manage the allocation of social housing, the Council has procured a new case management system to replace the paper based system. This will result in more efficient working. The costs are likely to be in the region of £35,000 for year 1 and £8,000 ongoing annually thereafter and will be met from existing budgets.

7. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are none.

9. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken at the drafting stage of the Policy. An updated Equality Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix 3.

10. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are none.

11. HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL'S COMMENTS

- 11.1 The Panel noted that a thorough consultation had been carried out, with 250 consultation responses being received, the majority of which had been from current Homesearch applicants. The level of support of those who responded on the consultation was pleasing. The Panel welcomed the proposed new Housing Allocation Policy. It was felt that the proposed new housing bands would enable Council housing to be allocated to those most in housing need. The Panel also noted that there was discretion within the policy to consider individual circumstances when determining the need for housing, which was reassuring.

12. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

12.1 I am very happy with the outcome of the consultation, which has confirmed that the proposed policy is sound. I have evaluated the report and recommend it to the Cabinet.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (a) Consider the summary of consultation responses to the statutory consultation; and
- (b) Recommend to the Council that the revised Housing Allocation Policy, as attached as Appendix 4 to this Report, be approved for adoption.
- (c) Authorise the Executive Head of Housing and Governance to sign off the re-registration period as complete and to activate the new allocation policy and housing register at the earliest opportunity.

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Background Papers

Published documents