

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE ALLOCATION POLICY - CONSULTATION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED CHANGES:

New Forest District Council (“the Council”) is proposing to change its approach to housing allocation.

WHY IS THE COUNCIL CHANGING ITS ALLOCATION POLICY?

The Council recognised that it needed to undertake a review of its housing allocation policy as a review had not been undertaken since 2012.

Furthermore, in accordance with the Secretary of State’s guidance, the Council needs to review its allocation policy to take into account the new duties to homeless households brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.¹

The changes to the Council’s allocation’s policy have been developed with regard to these new duties but have also been influenced by:

- (a) the prevailing housing needs and conditions within its district,
- (b) the results of the work of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group and the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel; and
- (c) the desire to ensure that applicant’s on the Council’s housing register are given appropriate priority to enable the Council to make the most effective use of its housing stock.

For a full copy of the Council’s proposed new allocation policy please visit <http://www.newforest.gov.uk/allocationconsultation>

CONSULTATION

A consultation over the proposed changes to the way social housing is allocated starts on 16 January 2019 and will close on 13 February 2019.

The Council is inviting comments on several changes being proposed on who can join the housing register and the way in which housing need is assessed.

¹ Paragraph 2.45 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018

Currently the Council's allocation policy has 4 bands. All applicants, apart from exceptional cases, are placed in Band 3: Priority. The only determining factor thereafter is the length of time the applicant has been on the housing register.

Bands	Number of Households ²
Band 1: High Priority (Urgent)	24
Band 2: High Priority	51
Band 3: Priority	3,120
Band 4: No Priority	207

10 out of 11 applicants on the Council's housing register are in Band 3: Priority. On average there are 300 properties per year that become available for allocation; applicants can wait up to 10 years for an allocation of housing. The current policy does not adequately allow for the allocation of housing on the basis of need.

WHAT WILL BE THE MAIN CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S ALLOCATION POLICY

A summary of the main proposed changes that will be introduced with the new allocations policy can be found below:

PROPOSED CHANGE: QUALIFICATION

Applicants will still need to be aged 16 or over and have a local connection as defined under the current allocation policy, but will also need to:

- (a) be in housing need; in that the applicant's housing circumstances fall within one of the proposed new policy's bands;
- (b) have been assessed as lacking the financial means to enable them to resolve their housing need; and

Applicants who do not satisfy the above criteria will not qualify to join the housing register. Furthermore, any applicant who falls within any of the categories below will be classed as non-qualifying to join the housing register:

- (a) are an owner-occupier (with the exception of those with a housing and assessed care need, who cannot resolve their own housing situation and have a need for extra-care or sheltered accommodation);
- (b) have deliberately worsened their circumstances to enable them to qualify onto the housing register; or
- (c) are deemed to be guilty of unacceptable behaviour that is serious enough to make them unsuitable as tenants.

REASONS FOR CHANGE

² Figures correct as at 13 September 2018

The Council believes it is important that there are clear qualifying criteria for joining the housing register that relate to an applicant’s housing need and also their conduct. This will ensure that scarce social housing within the Council’s district is allocated to those who have a genuine need for it and that those who do not have a need for subsidised social housing do not have access to it.

1. Do you agree that the qualification criteria as described above should be introduced?

Yes

No

Don't Know

Comments:

PROPOSED CHANGE: BEDROOM NEED ASSESSMENT

The Council is proposing to change the way it assesses the number of bedrooms that an applicant is entitled to under the allocation policy. The new bedroom need assessment has been set in line with the current regulations affecting bedroom entitlement for the purposes of calculating Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit.

PROPERTY TYPE/SIZE	HOUSEHOLD
Bedsit	Single Applicant
1 Bedroom	Single Applicant or Applicants living as a couple with no children
2 Bedrooms	Single Applicant, or Applicants living as a couple, with 1 child; or Single Applicant, or Applicants living as a couple, with 2 children of: (a) The same sex under 16 (b) Opposite sex under 10
3 Bedrooms	Single Applicant, or Applicants living as a couple with 2 children, with at least 1 of opposite sex over 10; Single Applicant, or Applicants living as a couple, with 3 children or 4 children: (a) Of the same sex under 16; or (b) Two children of each sex under 16 (c) of either sex all under 10
4 Bedrooms	Single Applicant, or Applicants with 5 or more children Single Applicant or Applicants with 4 children where at least one of them is aged 10 and is of the opposite sex of the others or one of them is aged 16 or over.

REASONS FOR CHANGE

To ensure that the bedroom needs assessment is set in line with current regulations affecting bedroom entitlement; this will avoid issues of affordability and also with our partner landlords who set bedroom entitlement according to the regulations.

2. Do you agree that it is correct to set bedroom need assessment in this way?

Yes

No

Don't
Know

Comments:

PROPOSED CHANGE: HOUSEHOLD

The Council proposes to change those who will be included as a member of an applicant's household on their housing application. Only the following groups of people will be treated as a member of an applicant's household:

- The applicant's spouse or cohabitant;
- The applicant's children/dependants aged 35 and under with whom the applicant resides or with whom the applicant might reasonably be expected to reside.

REASONS FOR CHANGE

The Council needs to ensure that applicants are only allowed to include in their housing application those members of their household that would reasonably be expected to reside with them. This is to ensure the effective use of family sized accommodation in the district area.

3. Is it correct for the Council to set household membership in this way so that there is effective use of family sized accommodation the Council's district?

Yes

No

Don't
Know

Comments:

PROPOSED CHANGES: HOUSING NEED ASSESSMENT

The Council proposes to introduce a new banding system for prioritising applications for an allocation of housing. The proposed new bands can be found below:

BAND	CRITERIA
Band 1 – Emergency Need for Housing	Applicants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Who require a management move: where the applicant has been assessed as having an exceptional need to move by a Senior Officer (b) Who have been assessed as having an urgent health and/or wellbeing need caused or substantially worsened by their home circumstances; (c) Whose accommodation has been assessed as being in a state of emergency disrepair and the hazards cannot be rectified within a reasonable timescale; or (d) Who need to move to escape violence or threats of violence, harassment or a traumatic event in the home.
Band 2. Serious Need for Housing	Applicants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Who have been accepted as being owed the full housing duty under the Act and where discharge of duty cannot be achieved by a Private Rented Sector Offer of accommodation; (b) Who are existing social housing tenants under-occupying by 2 or more bedrooms; (c) Who are severely overcrowded (e.g they lack 2 or more bedrooms, or have 2 children who lack a bedroom, such as a single parent with 2 children, where at least one of the children is over the age of 1 in a 1 bed home); (d) Who have been assessed as having a high health and/or wellbeing need caused or substantially worsened by their home circumstance; (e) Who live in a home assessed as being in a state of high disrepair and the disrepair cannot be rectified within reasonable timescales; or (f) Who have been assessed as ready to move on from supported housing in the Council’s district area.
BAND	CRITERIA

<p>Band 3 – Need for Housing</p>	<p>Applicants who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Are overcrowded and lack 1 bedroom; (b) Have been assessed as having medium health and/or wellbeing need caused or substantially worsened by their home circumstances; (c) Are certain serving, or former serving members of the regular forces, or their spouse or civil partner; (d) Are homeless, to whom the Council owes a Relief or Prevention Duty under Part VII of the Act; (e) Who need to move under the Right to Move provisions; (f) Are existing social landlord tenants under-occupying their accommodation by 1 bedroom; (g) Have been assessed as not having a permanent home, or are at risk of becoming homeless and are not owed a duty under (d) above; (h) Have been accepted as being owed the full housing duty under Part VII of the Act and where it is possible to discharge duty with a Private Rented Sector Offer of accommodation; or (i) Are key workers where the Council identifies that there is a critical need for the key worker to be rehoused to ensure the availability of an essential public service for the New Forest community.
<p>Band 4 – Lower Need for Housing</p>	<p>Applicants who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Have been assessed as having a lower health and/or wellbeing need caused or substantially worsened by their home circumstances; (b) Share essential facilities such as a toilet, bath, shower or kitchen with other households or lack essential facilities; (c) Are households sharing with relatives or friends; (d) Are occupants living in supported accommodation who have not been assessed as ready for move on from supported housing in the Council’s area. (j) Are assured shorthold tenants who do not have the financial means to purchase a property (see Appendix 2: Eligibility and Qualification); or (k) Have been assessed under Part VII of the Act as not in priority need or are intentionally homeless and are still statutory homeless at the point of offer.

With the exception of those who satisfy the rural connection provisions for a rural parish, anyone wishing to join the Council’s housing register will need to have an assessed housing need that falls into one of the 4 bands above.

REASONS FOR CHANGE

Under the Council’s current allocation policy, the main determining factor for an allocation of housing is time spent on the housing register. The Council believes it is important for social housing to be allocated to those who have an assessed housing need.

4. Is it correct for the Council to allocate scarce social housing, where demand far outweighs the supply, with reference to an applicant's housing need in accordance with the new priority bands?

Yes

No

Don't
Know

Comments:

PROPOSED CHANGES: SUSPENSION AND REMOVAL

Suspension:

An applicant will be suspended from the housing register in any of the following circumstances:

Where:

- An applicant has failed to bid on any properties within a 12 month period;
- An applicant has refused 2 offers of accommodation that have been deemed suitable following review, or where no review was lodged, in a 12 month period. This includes all offers made whether by successful bid, direct offer or automatic bid;
- An applicant who is owed a homeless duty and who refuses a suitable offer of accommodation made in discharge of duty owed;
- The Council becomes aware of a change of circumstance which requires re-assessment of housing need;
- An applicant has failed to complete and return a Renewal Request within 3 months of it being sent out;
- The Council receives information that the Applicant is no longer eligible or qualifying to be on the Register;
- The Council receives information that the Applicant has provided false information.

Removal:

An application will be removed from the housing register for the following reasons:

Where:

- The applicant requests that their application be removed;

- The applicant has died;
- The applicant has been rehoused; including where the applicant has accepted an offer of accommodation and lodged an unsuccessful review of its suitability;
- The applicant fails to return a renewal request within 3 months and there are no exceptional circumstances for delay;
- An allegation that an applicant is no longer eligible, qualifying or has provided false information is made out (this includes when this has occurred following the verification stage);
- Following two suspensions within a 12 month period.

REASONS FOR CHANGE

For the better management of the housing register, the Council is proposing to remove or suspend applications if certain circumstances apply.

5. Is it correct for the Council to manage applications on the housing register by suspending or removing applications due to conduct; for example, as outlined above, if an applicant fails to make bids or refuses suitable offers of accommodation?

Yes

No

Don't Know

Comments:

ANY FURTHER COMMENTS

6. The Council would like to invite you to make any further comments that you would like to be considered regarding the draft policy below.

PLEASE NOTE THE COUNCIL WILL NOT BE MAKING ANY CHANGES TO ITS RURAL PARISH CRITERIA

INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

7. Are you?

A Homesearch Applicant

Elected member

Replying on behalf of an Organisation

If so which one?

Support Worker

Not currently on the Homesearch register

Other

Please state

8. Are you?

A tenant of NFDC

A tenant of another social housing landlord

If so which one?

Private Rented Tenant

Of no fixed abode

Living with friends/family

Other

Please state

HOW TO RETURN THIS FORM

You may email a copy of the form to housing.options@nfdc.gov.uk

You may send a printed copy to:

Allocation Policy Consultation
Housing Options
New Forest District Council
Appletree Court
Beaulieu Road
Lyndhurst
SO43 7PA