

**REPORT TO: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING
13TH NOVEMBER 2007**

REPORT BY: HEAD OF COMMUNITY HOUSING

**REPORT WRITTEN BY: IVAN WESTERN, HOUSING OPTIONS
MANAGER**

SUBJECT: HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Local authorities have a duty to make sure that homes, which they own or have nomination rights to, are let in accordance with a published allocation scheme. The allocation scheme must describe the procedure for letting homes and for determining the relative priority accorded to different categories of applicant.
- 1.2 This report describes a number of changes, which need to be made to the current policy. Because of the ongoing work in Housing Options following the voids and allocations intervention officers are not yet in a position to bring forward a detailed scheme for approval. However in view of the importance of this policy, it seems prudent to provide the Executive member with an interim report spelling out the detail of the banding system which is currently in operation and spelling out the key principles on which it is proposed the revised allocation policy will eventually be based.
- 1.3 The Head of Community Housing expects to bring forward a revised allocation policy for approval by the Executive in February 2008.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Executive Member for Housing is recommended to:
 - 2.1.1 Endorse the key principles of the revised allocation policy as set out in paragraph 3 incorporating the four band system of priority which is described in appendix one.
 - 2.1.2 Authorise the Head of Community Housing to undertake further consultation with interested parties, including elected members on the final detail of the allocation scheme.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In the past housing registers were traditionally based on points systems in which applicants' needs were assessed and awarded a degree of priority reflecting the urgency of their need. Points awarded for housing need were supplemented by additional 'time on list' points reflecting the length of time an applicant had been waiting. Portsmouth abandoned its points system in 2003 and, in common with most larger councils introduced a system known as banding.

- 3.2 Portsmouth's existing allocation policy is based on eight bands in which applicants in similar categories of need are grouped together. Within each band applicants are assessed as having a low, medium or high priority. The eight current bands include: homelessness, multiple needs, inadequately housed, health care and support, management moves, accessible housing, priority rehousing panel, under occupation, adequately housed. Allowing for sub divisions within each of the bands there are a total of nearly 50 different banding codes in use.
- 3.3 To simplify this and to make it easier to determine the relative priority between applicants in different bands a change was introduced in July which effectively divided each of these codes into an ordered hierarchy of four bands. These are exceptional circumstances, high priority, medium priority and low priority. The detail of this is set out in appendix one.
- 3.4 The effect of this has been to create a much more clearly defined system of priority for the allocation of homes in which all applicants are ranked, first according to the priority of their band and secondly in date order depending on how long they have been in housing need.
- 3.5 This system has been in place for several months now and has made it much easier for officers to give applicants a realistic picture of how long they can expect to wait for different types of accommodation. We see this as a crucial requirement for two reasons: firstly to avoid applicants waiting for long periods for options which do not exist and secondly to enable applicants to make informed choices based on a realistic understanding of the different options which may be available.
- 3.6 As part of this process of change the council has adopted a different approach to applicants who are deemed 'adequately housed' and do not fall into one of the priority bands. This was explained in some detail in a report to the Executive in May when approval was given to cancel applications for applicants in this position.

4. PREPARING THE REVISED ALLOCATION POLICY

- 4.1 Since May significant changes have been made in the administrative process used to let council properties. One of the most noticeable examples of this is that we have dispensed with the need for applicants to complete a detailed application form. These changes have been designed to reduce waste and concentrate on providing a better service to the public.
- 4.2 Although most of the basic principles have been established there are still a number of detailed issues which need to be tested and agreed. Although many of these issues are administrative or procedural there are others which do need to be clearly set out in the allocation policy since they are likely to form the basis of decisions which may be subject to challenge. Examples of such issues would include:

- the approach to applicants who have turned down successive 'reasonable offers'
- the priority given to homeless households without creating a 'perverse incentive' for households to become homeless
- the approach to applicants who are in housing need but whose preferences cannot be met within the social housing stock or within a reasonable period
- the approach to applicants who deliberately worsen their housing circumstances to move into a higher band

4.3 There are also a variety of existing policies which have developed over the years and now need to be examined and challenged in the light of the changes we are making. Examples of these include:

- The 'second generation scheme' which enables Havant Borough Council to make nominations to specified properties in Havant
- The designation of 'quiet blocks' from which allocations to families with young children have been excluded
- Allocations to facilitate 'move on' from designated supported housing schemes
- The under-occupation scheme
- The facilities available to tenants, regardless of their housing need, who wish to move through an 'exchange'.

4.4 The plan is to continue testing approaches to these questions and with the intention of bringing forward a comprehensive revised allocation scheme for approval by the Executive in February.

5. **CITY SOLICITOR'S COMMENTS**

The City Solicitor is satisfied that it is within the Council's powers to approve the recommendations as set out.

6. SIGNING OFF THE DOCUMENT

.....
Alan Cufley - Head of Community Housing

Dated.....

APPROVAL TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS.

The recommendations set out above was approved / approved as amended / deferred / rejected by the Executive Member for Housing. on.....

Signed

.....
Councillor Hugh Mason
Executive Member for Housing.

Appendix 1. Housing Allocation Scheme:

Determining Priorities within the Bands

Applicants' housing needs will be fully assessed according to the criteria below. Applicants who are eligible to be considered for housing and deemed to have a current housing need will be placed within one of the four bands listed below. Applicants who are deemed not to be in housing need will not be accorded any priority within the scheme.

- Band 1 : Exceptional circumstances
- Band 2 : High priority housing need
- Band 3 : Medium priority housing need
- Band 4 : Low priority housing need

BAND 1

This band is for applicants where exceptional circumstances have been identified, this would involve life threatening situations, where there is an over-riding priority on medical or social grounds, and in circumstances where it is necessary to enable someone to move to release a very desirable property.

- (a) Applicants awaiting accessible or sheltered housing before they can be discharged from hospital.
- (b) Applicants whose household includes someone who has been assessed by an occupational therapist (OT) as having an exceptional need to move into an accessible property.
- (c) Applicants whose household includes someone with a life-threatening medical condition, which is directly linked to unsuitable housing conditions.
- (d) Applicants who have an LA or RSL assured tenancy of a disabled person unit or mobility unit and who no longer require an adapted property.
- (e) Applicants who have an LA or RSL assured tenancy of 3, 4 or 5 bedroom house who wish to move to a smaller property giving up 2 bedrooms (subject to property type & areas requested).
- (f) Any case agreed by a multi-agency Housing Panel to have an exceptional need to move. i.e. life threatening, child protection, public protection, unsanitary housing conditions or serious social problems. The multi-agency housing panel will review the priority given to cases on a regular basis and in some circumstances may restrict the priority to certain property types and areas.
- (g) Applicants whose household includes someone with a medical condition, which is directly linked to unsuitable housing conditions, and has been given a high priority medical assessment and is also living in a seriously overcrowded situation, i.e lacking 3+ bedrooms or lacking 2 bedrooms with inadequate facilities.

Band 2

This Band is for those applicants with an urgent need to move, and have been assessed as high priority.

- (a) Tenants who need to move because their home is about to be demolished, redeveloped or subject to major works, i.e. a Closing Order or Compulsory Purchase Order. Such cases can be moved to Band 1 through the multi-agency Housing Panel if necessary.
- (b) Applicants who are LA or RSL Assured Tenants where a management move has been recommended. These cases will be reviewed on a regular basis and priority may be restricted to certain property types and floor levels.
- (c) Applicants who have LA or RSL service tenancies who have been given notice to leave their accommodation and where the LA or RSL has a contractual obligation to re-house.
- (d) Vulnerable applicants who are ready to move on to independent living and who have been given priority by a Supported Housing Panel.
- (e) Applicants who have been assessed by an occupational therapist (OT) as having an urgent need to move into an accessible property.
- (f) Applicants who have LA or RSL tenancies who wish to move to a smaller property and who qualify for priority within the under-occupation scheme.
- (g) Applicants living in LA or RSL assured tenancies who are entitled to succeed to a tenancy but whose current property is too large for their requirements.
- (h) Applicants who are accepted as homeless under the homelessness legislation where no other housing option is available
- (i) Applicants who are accepted under the homelessness legislation and placed in either short-stay accommodation or accommodation that is not of an adequate size to meet immediate needs, and a duty is still owed.
- (j) Applicants recommended by the Head of Safeguarding who wish to foster or adopt children and whose current accommodation is not large enough.
- (k) Applicants who are care leavers and have been recommended for by the Head of Safeguarding.
- (l) Applicants living in a seriously overcrowded situation i.e. lacking 3 or more bedrooms or lacking 2 bedrooms with inadequate facilities.
- (m) Applicants whose household includes someone with a medical condition, which is directly linked to unsuitable housing conditions who have been given a high priority medical assessment.
- (n) Applicants whose household includes someone with a medical condition, which is directly linked to unsuitable housing conditions, and has been given a medium priority medical assessment and are also living in inadequate housing i.e. lacking 2 bedrooms or 1 bedroom with inadequate facilities.

Band 3

This band is for applicants who have an identified housing need, and have been assessed as medium priority.

- (a) Applicants whose household includes someone who has been assessed by an OT as having an identified need to move into an accessible property.
- (b) Applicants living in inadequate housing i.e. lacking 2 bedrooms or lacking 1 bedroom with inadequate facilities.
- (c) Applicants whose household includes someone with a medical condition, which is directly linked to unsuitable housing conditions, and has been given a medium priority medical assessment.

Band 4

This band is for applicants who have an identified housing need and have been assessed as having a low priority.

- (a) Applicants living in inadequate housing i.e. lacking 1 bedroom or lacking 0 bedrooms but with inadequate facilities
- (b) Applicants whose household includes anyone with a medical condition, which is directly linked to unsuitable housing conditions, and has been given a Low Priority Medical Assessment.
- (c) Applicants whose household includes someone who has been assessed by an OT as being adequately housed but who needs to move into another accessible property
- (d) Applicants over the age of 60 requesting category one sheltered housing who are currently adequately housed.