
Allocations Policy

To: **Cabinet – 22 January 2013**

Main Portfolio Area: Community Services

By: **Victoria May, Housing Options Manager**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All Ward affected**

Summary: **Implementation of a new Allocations Policy outlining how we will let social homes. Permission is required to go out for a 6 week consultation commencing 25 January 2013.**

For Decision

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The current Lettings Policy was adopted in October 2004 following publication of Allocations of Accommodation Code of Guidance. There is a statutory obligation for each local housing authority to publish how they will let their homes.
- 1.2 The economy has changed considerably and the new National Allocation Policy was published in June 2012 taking into account the new powers the Localism Act gives local Authorities.
- 1.3 This report is to request authorisation to consult on the new Allocations Policy for a period of six weeks. If agreed, I hope to commence this on 25 January 2013.

2.0 The Current Situation

- 2.1 This new Allocations Policy will supersede the existing Lettings Policy which was written in 2004 and is out of date. Households will still be allocated into a priority band A, B, C & D and the new system will ensure we have minimal households in the top two bands giving far more opportunity to band C households which would be households who fall within a 'reasonable preference' category as stipulated through the Housing Act. This will prevent the 'top heavy' housing register that currently exists.
- 2.2 As part of writing the new policy there have been 3 members' workshops held in September 2012 that 17 members attended with cross party representation. At this stage the main Localism Act powers were discussed and useful feedback was received. In October 2012 the Housing Options Team met to discuss the policy to ensure that this document not only worked as a strategic document but also was a robust working policy.
- 2.3 East Kent Housing manages the social housing stock and therefore it was essential to have their input when writing the document. In November 2012 discussions took place with the Housing Manager, Senior Neighbourhood Manager and a representative from the Housing Officers.

2.4 SMT (the larger one) were informed of the key changes to the Allocation Policy in December 2012.

2.5 The main differences are:

Now	New	Reason why
Anyone can register for the Councils housing register. Most have no or little prospect of being re-housed.	Closed Housing Register	Enabling the Council to prioritise Thanet residents due to the existing housing need of residents locally.
No residential criteria	Applicants will be required to meet minimum three years residency criteria to qualify for the housing register.	To ensure residents that are housed are living and contributing to the Thanet area
No blanket exclusion on households who have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour	Exclusion for households who have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour	To ensure the council reinforces minimal standards of behaviour which will contribute towards a sustainable community.
Additional bedrooms for families with two children of the opposite sex where the eldest is over 8 years old	Additional bedrooms for families with two children of the opposite sex where the eldest is over 10 years old	To be in line with Housing Benefit and ensure that households are in affordable accommodation, avoiding eviction through non-payment of rent.
No guidance at present and requires each case to be decided on its own merit.	Additional bedroom requests for carers in line with Housing Benefit guidance	To be in line with Housing Benefits and ensure family units are only offered to those that most require it due to medical circumstances and that accommodation offered will be affordable.
Homeless Households are placed into Band A	Homeless Households placed into Band C	To be treated like all other categories of 'Reasonable Preference' as stipulated under the Housing Act. Also to change perceptions of the 'passport' into social housing and minimise the use of emergency accommodation.
Not stipulated in existing policy	Armed Forces Personnel prioritised and not effected by other criteria's set out in policy	The Council wishes to demonstrate the support that Armed Forces personnel will have fair access to housing without being discriminated.

No blanket exclusion on households who have debts outstanding to the Council.	Tighter guidelines on former and current rent arrears taking into consideration of the changes to welfare reform.	To ensure that households take responsibility for debts owed to the local authority and appropriate support is offered to those effected by welfare reform.
There is no income or asset restriction for households applying to be housed. People who could afford to buy or rent in the private sector are able to go on the council's Housing Register.	A cap on assets and savings to the value of £16k inc exclusion for households earning a salary in the next tax bracket	To be in line with Housing Benefit regulations and It is felt that households with a level of income or assets are in a position to resolve their own circumstances in the private sector or by home ownership.

- 2.6 A public consultation will be held from Friday 25 January to Friday 1 March 2013 to give members of the public an opportunity to comment on the draft Allocations Policy. The consultation will be available to complete online and hard copy surveys will also be available upon request or to collect from local libraries and council offices. The consultation will be promoted through the local press, on the council's website, by posters in key public places and through social media channels. Key stakeholder and partner organisations will be contacted directly to ensure they have an opportunity to comment and to invite them to promote the consultation through their own communication channels to their customers. A link to the online survey will also be published on the Kent Homechoice website to residents currently bidding for a property.

3.0 Options

- 3.1 For Cabinet to agree the document to go out to consultation

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 Go out to Consultation commencing 25 January 2013.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 Financial and VAT

- 5.1.1 Total project cost was forecast against Housing Options Manager time and was estimated £4000

5.2 Legal

- 5.2.1 The Housing Act outlines in Section 167(7) of Part 6 says:

(7) Before adopting an allocation scheme, or making an alteration to their scheme reflecting a major change of policy, a local housing authority shall—

(a) Send a copy of the draft scheme, or proposed alteration, to every registered social landlord with which they have nomination arrangements (see section 159(4)), and

(b) Afford those persons a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals.

5.2.2 Legal advice has been obtained when writing about Data Protection, Personal Data and Statute Barred and this advice has been used to inform writing the document accurately.

5.3 Corporate

5.3.1 There are corporate risks as any part of the new Allocations Policy can be legally challenged however this should be addressed at consultation stage.

5.3.2 The Allocations Policy document support the corporate plan priorities:

- Priority 2 '*We will tackle disadvantage across our district*' as the new allocation policy will create more opportunity for households in disadvantaged areas as they will be banded in a position that will enable re-housing
- Priority 7 '*We will plan for the right type and number of homes in the right place to create sustainable communities in the future*' When we move onto online registration the system will enable us to report on need and therefore this will inform the housing strategy team when looking at developments and types of homes required.
- Priority 10 '*We will influence the work of other agencies to ensure the best outcomes for Thanet*' Continued work with partner agencies will ensure that we house those most in need and ensure that stock is used appropriately to minimise Anti Social Behaviour and ensuring all relevant agencies are involved with vulnerable families.

5.4 Equity and Equalities

5.4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is being carried out to illustrate the main aspects or impact on any specific groups – young, old, unemployed, disabled. This will be available in draft for Overview and Scrutiny on 15 January 2013.

6.0 Recommendation(s)

6.1 Members' views are sought regarding the consultation document and process;

6.2 Cabinet is asked to approve the consultation document and process.

7.0 Decision Making Process

7.1 This is a policy framework key decision and is going to cabinet on the 22 January 2013 to get the view of Members and seek Cabinet approval of the consultation document. This new Allocation Policy could potentially affect all Thanet residents requiring re-housing.

7.2 Further dates for the corporate process are as follows:

Cabinet Agenda (<i>Doc & approval for consultation</i>)	Craig George	04/01/2013	07/01/2013
Overview & Scrutiny Panel	Vicky May	21/12/2012	15/01/2013
Cabinet (<i>Doc & approval for consultation</i>)	Madeline Homer	11/01/2013	22/01/2013
Consultation for 6 weeks	V May/H Thorpe	25/01/2013	25/01/2013
SMT	Craig George	01/03/2013	05/03/ 2013
Cabinet Agenda Conference ~(after consultation)	Craig George	06/03/2013	11/03/2013
Cabinet	Madeline Homer	14/03/2013	28/03/2013
Full Council	Madeline Homer	05/04/2013	18/04/2013

Contact Officer:	Victoria May, Housing Options Manager
Reporting to:	Madeline Homer, Director of Community Services

Annex List

Annex 1	Allocation Policy
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Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Sarah Martin, Financial Services Manager
Legal	Harvey Patterson, Corporate & Regulatory Services Manager Gary Cordes, Legal Services Manager
Communications	Hannah Thorpe, Corporate Communications Officer