
ALLOCATIONS POLICY

To: **Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 23 April 2013**

Main Portfolio Area: **Housing & Panning Services**

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

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All wards**

Summary: **To seek members views on the Allocations Policy following the close of the consultation.**

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. 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. This report is to obtain Overview and Scrutiny views following the close of consultation. The consultation comments are attached.

2.0 The Current Situation

2.1 The Allocations Policy made nine key proposed radical changes in the new policy which are:

- Closed housing register to households outside of the Thanet district
- Introducing a residential criteria
- Tighter guidelines when accessing unacceptable behaviour
- Rise in age for additional bedrooms for children of opposite sex
- Tighter guidelines on additional bedroom requests for carers
- Re-categorisation of priority bands
- Priority for Armed Forces personnel
- Tighter guidelines on dealing with households who owe current or former tenancy debts
- Clarification on income, savings and assets

2.2 The proposed changes were originally discussed and introduced to members in September/October 2012 via 3 workshops which 19 Councillors attended. The Allocations Policy was also presented to the SMT Managers Forum on 20th December 2012 and a further Cabinet briefing was held on 7th January 2013. Additional workshops were held with East Kent Housing and the Housing Options Team which was informative.

2.3 The Allocation Policy did receive a lot of media interest including local paper coverage and discussions were aired twice on local radio stations. Cllr Green was invited to attend a discussion on BBC Parliament around proposed changes.

- 2.4 The main focus of the Allocations Policy is to use the powers outlined in the Localism Act to prioritise local people within Thanet and ensure that households that apply on the housing register are assessed fairly to maximise the use of the available stock by ensuring that households are housed in appropriate sized, affordable accommodation and that we house those in the most housing need.
- 2.5 The 5 week public consultation closed on 1 March 2013. We emailed out a link to the draft Allocations Policy to approximately 100 stakeholders to include housing associations, East Kent local authorities, Kent County Council, Thanet MPs & Members and other partner organisations. A dedicated page was uploaded onto the TDC website for the duration of the consultation and there were also links from the communications consultation pages. In addition to target the existing households on the housing register an information page was set up on KentHomechoice enabling those that were actively placing bids for social housing to view the document and take part in the snap survey for the consultation. Hard copies were made available for collection at the Gateway and were posted out to residents on request who were unable to access a computer or call into the gateway.
- 2.6 In total we received 178 online responses of which 72 were households on the housing register. The comments made focussed on the nine key areas and the following issues relating to the content of the Allocations policy were raised from the responses and have been incorporated into the final revised Allocations policy for Overview and Scrutiny & cabinet to agree.

3.0 Results and actions

3.1. Closed housing register to households outside of the Thanet district

Result: This was supported with 88.2%(157) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 2.2%(4) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 9.6%(17) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal. Of the 9.6%(17), 23.5%(4) of these responses were from households on the housing register that live outside of the Thanet District.

Action: No change to policy

3.2 Introducing a residential criteria

Result: This was supported with 82%(146) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 2.8%(5) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 14.7%(26) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal. Of the 14.7%(26), 26.9%(7) of these responses were from outside of the Thanet District.

Action: Due to homeless households being assessed against local connection criteria in the Housing Act 1996 (amended 2002) they should be excluded from the residential criteria.

Reason: To ensure households owed a Homeless duty are accommodated promptly with minimal time spent in emergency accommodation.

3.3 Tighter guidelines when accessing unacceptable behaviour

Result: This was supported with 92.1%(164) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 3.9%(7) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 3.3%(6) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal.

Action: No change to policy

3.4. Rise in age for additional bedrooms for children of opposite sex

Result: This was supported with 69.7%(124) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 10.7%(19) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 18%(32) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal. Of the 18%(32), 46.9%(15) are currently on the Housing Register.

Action: No change to policy

3.5. Tighter guidelines on additional bedroom requests for carers

Result: This was supported with 71.4% (127) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 19.7% (35) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 7.9% (14) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal. Of the 71.4%(127) who agreed and strongly agreed with this proposal, 23.6%(30) are registered disabled.

Action: No change to policy

3.6. Re-categorisation of priority bands

Result: This was supported with 74.7% (133) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 14% (25) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 10.2% (18) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal. Of all the responses received 40.4% (72) were received from households on the Housing Register.

Action: No change to the policy

3.7. Priority for Armed Forces personnel

Result: Of all the responses received, 65.7%(117) of people agreed or strongly agreed, with 21.9% (39) neither agreed or disagreed, and 11.8% (21) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal.

Action: Apply a residential criteria for members of the Armed forces

Reason: To prevent influx of Armed Forces Personnel who have no connection to the Thanet District accessing the limited social housing.

3.8. Tighter guidelines on dealing with households who owe current or former tenancy debts

Result: This was supported with 87.7% (156) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 6.2%(11) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 5.1% (3) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal.

Action: No change to policy

3.9. Clarification on income, savings and assets

Result: This was supported with 80.9% (144) of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, with 7.9%(14) neither agreeing or disagreeing, and 9.6%(17) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this proposal.

Action: To reword and divide this section to improve understanding.

Reason: Response to consultation identified some confusion surrounding the criteria of income, savings and assets.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 For Overview and Scrutiny to view, make comments and recommend approval of the final version of the Allocation Policy, which can then progress to Cabinet and Council for final approval.

5.0 Next Steps

- 5.1 To take the Allocation Policy to Cabinet and Council.

6.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 Financial and VAT

- 5.1.1 The Allocations Policy has very limited financial implications. The consultation has been carried out using the TDC web pages and links to these web pages were emailed out to stakeholders. We produced some hardcopy documents and in addition to officer time, this is the only cost incurred in producing the policy.

5.2 Legal

- 5.2.1 The author considers there are no legal implications.

5.3 Corporate

- 5.3.1 The Housing Policy has strong links with the ethos and priorities of the Corporate Plan. In particular Priority 2 “We will tackle disadvantage across the district” stating we will focus on disadvantaged groups to better target the services they need & working with partners to tackle the main housing issues effecting local people. Other priorities like 7: “We will plan for the right type and number of homes in the right place to create sustainable communities in the future.” Meeting local housing need and supporting this by housing local people will improve Thanet residents’ quality of life.

5.4 Equity and Equalities

- 5.4.1 Equity and equality are addressed within the policy, but an Equalities Impact Assessment has also produced (please see attached). The policy does not negatively impact on any residents of the district and aims to improve the chances of households in housing need to be being re-housed in social housing.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 Members views are sought on the recommendations of Allocations policy;
- 6.2 For the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to recommend the Allocations policy for approval.

7.0 Decision Making Process

- 7.1 This is a key decision to go to Cabinet and Full Council. It is a key decision because the Allocations Policy is for the whole district and therefore affects all wards.

Future Meeting:	Date:
Cabinet (Extraordinary)	29 May 2013
Full Council	11 July 2013

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

Annex List

Annex 1	Amended Allocations Policy draft
Annex 2	Consultation comments

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
Communications	Hannah Thorpe, Corporate Communications Officer