

Allocations Policy Consultation results.

To: Bob Porter, Head of Housing & Cllr Lesley Game Portfolio Holder

From: Victoria May, Housing Options Manager

Date: 3 January 2019

Consultation

The consultation took place - 9 November - 21st December 2018. A short link was designed on the website that asked 5 specific questions which were the proposed key additions to the allocations policy. This link was sent to:

- Members
- CMT
- Heads of service
- Civica
- East Kent Housing
- Housing Associations
- Charities
- Churches
- Voluntary sector
- Statutory partners

A targeted housing options was added to KentHomeChoice which was available to every eligible member on the Councils housing register. This is targeted at all households on the councils housing register and would be on their homepage when they log in. This could give up to 2600 households the opportunity to make comments and complete the questionnaire. This consultation was also added to the Kent Housing Group website news feed.

The Housing Options Manager and Head of Housing attended overview and scrutiny on Tuesday 13th November to share proposed changes with panel members and on Thursday 29th November there was a further opportunity for members to discuss and have their view on the proposed changes at the housing coffee evening.

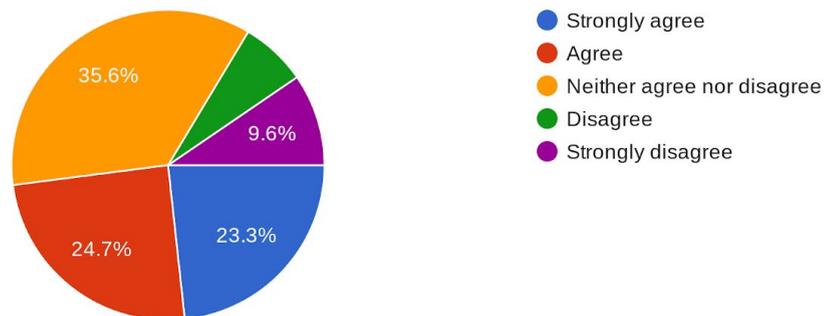
A briefing was held with Thanet tenants & leaseholders group which was co-ordinated through East Kent Housing and held on Monday 19th November. A feedback report was provided by East Kent Housing detailing views shared at the meeting about the proposed changes outlined by the 4 members attended.

The responses

Throughout the consultation period there has been 73 responses and have had 18 comments. There are 5 key areas consulted on and each details the response.

1. Key Workers

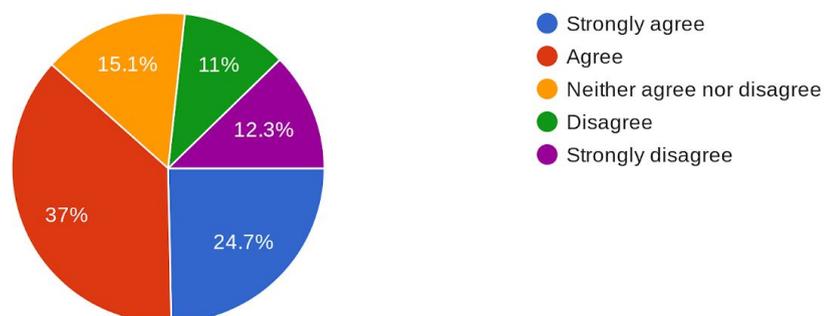
The council recognises that key workers can be on low income levels and face challenges to secure housing. The council wants to provide housing opportunities for key workers. The proposal is to place them into band C.



This shows 48% of consultees strongly agree or agree with this proposal with only 16.4% strongly disagreeing and disagreeing with this.

2. Failure to bid/direct offers

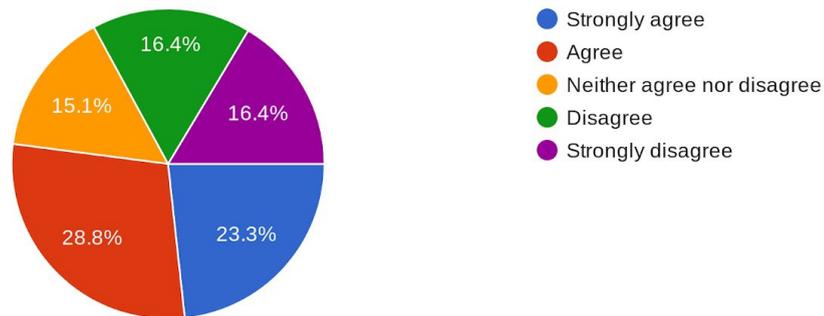
The council wants to house customers in the most need. In situations where applicants have failed to place bids, or are unrealistic with the choices available, they will lose the opportunity to bid. The council will instead make a direct offer of accommodation that meets the household's housing need.



This shows 61.37% of consultees strongly agree or agree with this proposal with 22.3% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with this.

3. One suitable offer

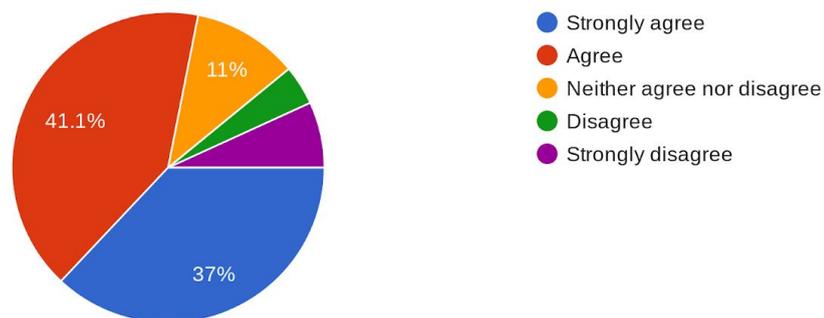
Customers have the opportunity to express interest in a home. If an offer is made that meets their housing need but they refuse it with reasons that are not deemed reasonable, the proposal is that households will be removed from the council's housing register.



This shows 52.1% of consultees strongly agree or agree with this proposal with 32.8% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with this.

4. Homeless priority

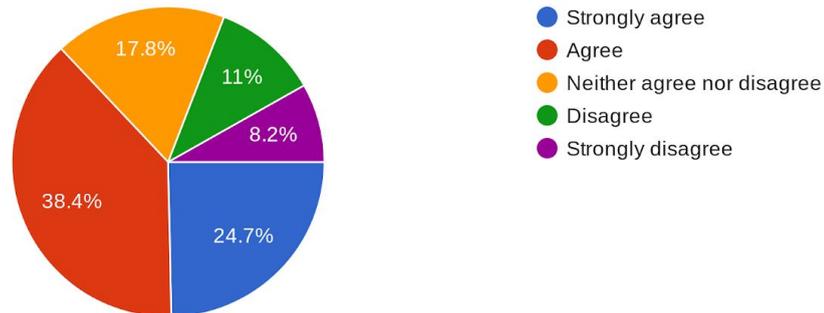
It is proposed that cases in emergency accommodation provided by the council, and that were accepted as homeless, in priority need and unintentionally homeless, before 3 April 2018 will be awarded a new banding: band B rather than band C. This will give them a greater chance to leave their temporary accommodation and find a settled home.



This shows 78.1% of consultees strongly agree or agree with this proposal with only 10.9% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with this. Having reviewed the number of households in emergency accommodation this would benefit 23 cases in temporary accommodation and a further 20 households owed a duty staying with friends and family.

5. Households who owe a former tenancy debt with a council or housing association

It is proposed that households with tenancy debt will be allowed onto the housing register with a reduced priority until the debt has been cleared. The proposal is to place these households into band D.



This shows 63.1% of consultees strongly agree or agree with this proposal with only 19.2% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with this.

There were 18 further comments that I have responded to. These are in Appendix 1 .

Changes proposed following the consultation

- Section 3.5 - Suitable size of accommodation - added universal credit alongside housing benefit
- Section 4.1 - Homeless households - made it clear that acceptance into band B will be from when they were accepted as homeless.
- Section 4.7 - Added care workers and other essential workers to category of key workers.
- Section 4.8 - Rough Sleepers - Added a section
- Section 8.1 - Thanet District Council tenants - Removed '*East Kent Housing will make 3 attempts to visit your home*'.
- Section 8.3 - Management transfers - Amended wording to ensure it is clear that a recommendation will come from EKH and the Council will be the decision maker.
- Section 10.4 - Placing bids - Removed the 6 month timeframe as this cannot be monitored by the service.
- Section 3.5 - Suitable size accommodation - Added a line in the chart to include couples or single people with a carer over the age of 55 years old to be considered for sheltered and older persons accommodation only.
- Section 3.6 - Additional bedroom requests/carers - Made clear that for those over the age of 55 that feel they require a carer and there is evidence to support this then they can be considered if sheltered or older person accommodation is required.
- Section 6.2 - Former tenancy debts - added regarding arrears 'the current landlord has confirmed that an acceptable agreement has been maintained to clear the debt'.
- Section 12.1 - Right to review - Added a sentence to make it clear that late reviews will be at the discretion of the council.

- Section 4.6 - Armed Forces Personnel - Added a section regarding former spouse or civil partners who needs to leave armed forces accommodation.

Conclusion

The response to the consultation has been supported and the amendments i wish to make are above.

Recommendation

My recommendation that these are agreed and a decision notice is published asap.

END

- Why has there been a date of before April 2018 added ?
This is because the councils legal duties changed on 3 April 2018 and prevention and relief duties were introduced which provides a focus on finding a housing solution prior to a homeless application. Cases before this time which we now deem 'legacy' are more challenging to place in the private sector due to the legislation requirements.
- Anyone in Temporary housing needs to be offered a permanent home as soon as possible as their needs are greater.
The Allocations policy reflects the council's position on this.
- I do think Key Workers should be given a higher priority than suggested in this consultation.
If there housing need reflects a greater need there banding will be higher.
- Orbit has just sold one of our elderly/disabled one bedrooms bungalows in Bridges Close. We have been told that as we die off or leave they will sell all of them.
This is not right. All the houses being forced on us in St.Nicholas-at-Wade are not for downsizing. We will be left with no housing for the elderly and disabled.
Orbit do consult the Council with disposal of homes and the housing strategy captures future housing need in the district.
- People's personal circumstances should be prioritised on each case I'm struggling with my housing situation but don't get anywhere
The Allocations policy reflects the council's position on this.
- Need clearer guidelines on allocation of 2 bedrooms for medical needs e.g. autism, medical equipment, mental health issues.
This is covered in section 3.6
- Give everyone the right to council housing not just ones in need even to those who are having to live in private rent and can not afford the rent because of the caps should be allowed to bid for properties your housing policy is a disgrace
With the limited social housing available the Localism Act enables Councils to shape their allocation scheme to ensure those in the most need are housed.
- Regarding key workers, not all key workers are on a low wage in fact most are on a higher than average wage, I consider that key workers could be accessing social housing that should be available for the low paid and / or people on zero hour contracts. We know there are lots of working people in Thanet that are in this

situation and despite working they sometimes exist on handouts and extra help from food banks and charities.

The Allocations policy covers income in section 6.3 and households earning a higher rate salary or additional rate taxable bands (as per HM Revenue & Customs) will not be eligible to join the housing register.

- Transfer only bids or higher priority for those already in social housing, with so many people waiting for homes people are sitting in properties waiting for transfers for long periods of time in a band C

Housing need is assessed in the same way however there may be scope to prioritise existing tenants in some instances

- Item 2 should have a right of appeal.

There is a right to a review on any decision made which is detailed in section 12.1

- Please ensure that Thanets residents are always first to be housed before any other council dumps its list on Thanet taxpayers.

The Allocations Policy stipulates in section 2.1 the residential criteria

- There should be an increased priority for key workers who have become unintentionally homeless and who work in the NHS/Police within Thanet.

The Allocations policy reflects the council's position on this.

- I think those with severe mental health issues which are affected by housing needs should be taken more serious and banded as a higher priority like those with physical disabilities

The Allocations policy reflects the council's position on this.

- I would like to see a system where after a period of time, say 5 years, tenants living in flats with children who have been a 'good' tenant e.g. always paid rent on time, no complaints against them and have kept the property in good order can be placed on a waiting list to transfer to the next available house (with same number of bedrooms). Children do much better when they have a garden and more space to play, and living in flats is not the ideal scenario for families - even with the right number of bedrooms they can be cramped, noisy and damaging to mental wellbeing. This would free up flats for those coming on to the social housing register and would act as an incentive for families in flats to be good tenants, giving them something to aspire to, as well as improving the wellbeing of children living in areas of high deprivation.

This is being explored through the acquisition programme.

- We understand that that Council would wish to provide priority to these groups. So where an allocation is made and a tenant is provided with a flexible tenancy the Council's Tenancy Strategy sets out the issues to be considered before the decision to renew this is taken, and generally this looks to consider if the reason that the initial tenancy was granted are still relevant. Therefore would the council be looking to have EKH consider that the key worker employment status has been maintained. To aid in this assessment additional information would be required that clearly defines this status, for example would NHS contractors be eligible, would staff on temporary contractor be eligible. If this is to be the case this will need to be included within the Council's Tenancy Strategy.

This is outlined in section 4.7 of the Allocations Policy

- Would consideration be given to where a tenant is maintaining a repayment plan. Added a section in 6.2 to agree that the debt needs to be cleared or the current landlord has confirmed that an acceptable agreement has been maintained to clear the debt.

- Section 2.1 There is no mention of households not being eligible such as those subject to immigration control.

This is covered in section 2.2

- Section 2.2 Clarification would be helpful as to whether non-dependant adult children, non-relatives or lodgers are part of a household.

This is covered in section 3.5

- Confirmation of the child status would assist eg under the age of 18 unless in education etc.

For the purpose of housing need, this isn't necessary to add the bedroom need and accommodation type would remain the same

- Section 2.1 Confirm that residency has been through choice so not placed by others in your area

This is not relevant providing they meet the criteria

- Section 3.5 mentioned HB should be made of the Universal Credit Regulations in assessing size of accommodation as well as HB

This has been added

- Section 4.2 We would suggest that mention is made of the provision of the Victims of Domestic Abuse Act 2018 is made and the granting of their tenancies.

This has been covered in the Tenancy Strategy

- Section 6.1 Where the current arrears are as a result of Universal Credit what allowance would be made, particularly for those households who have entered into and are working to a repayment plan. The current policy had provision for this and we would suggest this should be maintained.

This is not relevant as the section details that the rent account needs to be cleared before an offer of accommodation is made

- Section 8.1 Makes specific reference to EKH making 3 attempts, this is a change from the previous policy which confirmed that the application would be subject to checks and this would seem more appropriate.

Removed 'East Kent Housing will make 3 attempts to visit your home'.

- 8.3 The proposed policy says that "Management Transfers are agreed jointly by the Landlord's Housing Manager in relation to tenancy management and the Housing Options Manager". This differs from the current situation where the Council as the landlord makes the decision which would seem appropriate and we would suggest that this remains the same and would ask that the policy is reviewed to reflect this.

Amended the wording to reflect that East Kent Housing will make the recommendation to the council and the decision will be made by Thanet District Council.

- Page 8 of the Council's Tenancy Strategy states that the grounds for not renewing a flexible tenancy "must be clearly set out and published in the allocations policy. But this detail does not seem to have been provided.

This has been added in section 9.3

- I have placed bids on suitable properties that then have been denied to me. I am disabled so it needs to be adapted but they just give it to someone else. Not even discussed with me. 5 years waiting now it is wrong I have not seen my children.

Kenthomechoice outlines provides feedback on outcomes of advertised homes.

- Section 4.7 Key Workers. I think this is poorly worded on the consultation question and clarification is needed. I would suggest key workers should not receive extra priority if they can move locally themselves. I think any extra priority should cease if at the time of an offer, it is determined that the key worker has already moved to a tenure locally.

Key Workers are not awarded 'extra priority' unless their housing need reflects this.

- Section 10.4 Consequences of failure to bid. This shouldn't be on a timeframe but judged by suitable properties that the applicant could have bid on. I also think leniency should be given as there are many good reasons why an applicant may not want to live in a particular area. If this amendment is driven by wanting to have less applicants on the housing need register then I think allocations should be explained better; although applicants are in housing need, this need doesn't mean they are homeless as the media often portray higher numbers on HNR's can mean.

Removed timeframe

- Section 6.2 Households who owed a former tenancy debt. This is another poorly worded question on the consultation document as it is not clear whether you are being asked to agree or disagree with these households being penalised or to agree or disagree with these households being allowed onto the housing need register at all. I agree that FTA's should lead to less priority as a minimum and that these households should only be considered after all other households who have bid on a property who do not have FTA's (social housing arrears only). Alternatively, these arrears should be paid off as a term of the new tenancy.

This is outlined in the Allocations Policy

It is good that applicants requiring level access accommodation will be prioritised for suitable properties before people who do not. However, it would be good if the allocations policy gave applicants confidence that the drive to keep void turnaround times to a minimum will not override the need for TDC to work with Occupational Therapy/Social Services and fail to adapt properties that would have been suitable for people with disabilities.

This does not need to be explicit in the Allocations Policy as is working practice.

- Rough sleepers: The current allocations policy does not explicitly reference rough sleepers. Some other districts have included a section on verified rough sleepers and awarded priority to those people who can be verified as having nothing and bedded down on the streets. Often rough sleepers can be the most vulnerable in society and could consideration be given to allocate a proportion of social lets to people who are verified rough sleepers and engaging with support services. Further consideration could be given to look at a percentage as a housing first allocations model as some other councils, such as Milton Keynes and Southwark have done in recognition of the national government's commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027.

This has been added in section 4.8

- Customers with debt who are vulnerable: Whilst I think it is fair to allow people onto the register with debt - is there flexibility around this, eg those with exceptional

reasons as to why that debt hasn't been paid, eg rough sleepers. Is there scope to allow them to bid whilst they are clearing the debt. Eg if they have accepted their arrears as a deduction from their benefits, or consolidated arrears into a debt consolidation order? if this sufficient ? As for some on benefits, clearing that debt could take years ? And they may still be very vulnerable during this period of repayment.

This is outlined in section 6.2

- Financial exploitation: Similarly could it be recognised that there could be instances where debts may have been accrued due to domestic abuse or financial exploitation, eg a partner or ex partner diverting or controlling the household benefits in cases of joint claims allowing tenancy debt/ arrears to build. In circumstances where this can be evidenced could there be flexibility to excuse or make alternative arrangements for those arrears.

This is outlined in section 6.2