



Report to: Cabinet Meeting: 23 July 2024

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier, Housing Portfolio Holder

Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director Housing, Health and Wellbeing

Lead Officer: Maria Cook, Assistant Business Manager – Housing & Estate Management

Report Summary	
Type of report	Open report
Report Title	Draft Allocation Scheme and Consultation
Purpose of Report	To provide an update on the review of the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme, presenting the proposals for change coming out of the review - the revised draft Scheme and seeking approval for external consultation.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) That Cabinet note the scheme and its changes and approve progression for external consultation. b) That Cabinet delegate authority for final adoption of the Scheme to the Portfolio Holder for Housing in consultation with the Director for Housing, Health and Wellbeing if the outcome of consultation is that no or only minor amendments are required. If any significant or material amendments are proposed as a result of consultation responses the final proposed Scheme will be referred back to Cabinet for approval
Alternative Options Considered	None
Reason for Recommendations	This consultation is a legal requirement set out in the Housing Act 1996 and if there are no major changes following consultation seeking Director and Portfolio Holder sign off to expedite implementation. This also meets Objective 1: Improve Health and Wellbeing, and Objective 2: Increase the Supply, Choice, and Standard of Housing of the Community Plan.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Throughout 2023 the project team have been working on a review of the housing register and replacement allocation scheme. As part of this work consultations have been held with Members, staff, service users and involved tenants.
- 1.2 As part of the project, in May 2023 a review of the housing register was undertaken and having processed all of the returns it saw the housing register reduce from just over 6,000 applicants down to 2,700 applicants as of June 2024.
- 1.3 In addition to this reduction, in March 2024 the government released a consultation – Reform of Social Housing and as part of our response to this consultation workshops were held with Members to contribute to the response.
- 1.4 The response was submitted to DLUHC and the project team were awaiting the outcome of this prior to finalising the draft Allocation Scheme as elements of the proposal would make some significant changes to the policy. However, there has been a delay in the release and therefore the team have progressed on with the draft policy to ensure it conforms with the projects timetable. In addition to this, there is a requirement when making major changes to the allocation scheme to consult with registered providers for a period of 12 weeks and the draft scheme has had its timelines matched with the Housing Management System project to enable system build meaning the draft scheme cannot wait for the outcomes from the consultation.

2.0 Proposal/Options Considered and Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 Attached to this report is a full copy of the draft allocation scheme and its appendices however below in 2.2 is an overview of the changes made, for ease of reference.

2.2 Table of Main Changes/Updates

Section			Other LA's
Introduction	Updated	No significant change	N/A
Legal Framework	Refreshed to ensure compliance	No significant change	Legally Required
Reasonable Preference Categories	Refreshed to ensure compliance	No Significant change	Legally Required
Eligibility and Qualification	Updated	Changes: exclusions for being on the register when ineligible Main body of text relating to eligibility transferred to an appendices so can easily be updated without the need to change the scheme.	Many LA's practice this to keep housing register numbers realistic.

Local Connection	Updated	Cannot join the register without an established local connection.	Most LA's have some form of local connection criteria to support local residents accessing accommodation.
Advocates	Refreshed	No significant change	N/A
Information Declaration	Refreshed	No significant change	N/A
Exclusions	Refreshed	No significant change	N/A
Assessment of Housing Need	Refreshed	No significant change	N/A
Financial Resources and Affordability	Updated	Changes: including income thresholds that will exclude an applicant from allocation	Many LA's have financial assessments and restrictions in an attempt to preserve stock for those who need it/cannot access other choices.
Saving/Assets/Capital	New Section	Sets a threshold of savings and reviews disposal of assets for housing purposes.	Many LA's have savings/assets/capital assessments and restrictions in an attempt to preserve stock for those who need it/cannot access other choices.
Band 1	Refreshed	No significant change	Includes all required reasonable preference elements
Band 2	Refreshed	No significant change	Includes all required reasonable preference elements
Band 3	Refreshed	No significant change	Includes all required reasonable preference elements
Band 4	Updated	Widening of details on deliberately worsening of circumstances and the consequences of this .	Many LA's have this section included to prevent misuse of stock and assets.
Advertising Properties	Refreshed	Will be revisited when NEC system build is underway to make better use	N/A

		of electronic systems and supports	
Allocation Procedure	Refreshed	To ensure remains legally compliant	N/A
Not offering a tenancy to the highest bidder	New Section	Increasing transparency when standard procedures are not in use for allocating.	Many LA's have similar flexibility and transparency in their schemes.
Direct Offers	Refreshed and increased into a section on its own	Increasing transparency when standard procedures are not in use for allocating.	Many LA's have similar flexibility and transparency in their schemes.
Penalties for Refusal	Strengthened	Increased 'no reason' refusals taking up significant officer time	Many LA's have similar flexibility and transparency in their schemes.
Suitability Criteria	Refreshed	Changes reflecting amendments identified in this table	N/A
Effective and Efficient Management of Stock	Refreshed and Strengthened	Increasing transparency when standard procedures are not in use for allocating.	N/A
Local Lettings Schemes	Refreshed	No significant change	N/A
Compliments, Comments and Complaints	Refreshed	Linkage to Corporate Stage 2 complaint removed as not legally compliant	N/A
Reviews and Appeals	Strengthened	Increasing transparency	N/A
Equality and diversity	New section	Statement of intent	N/A
Transfer Applicants	New Section	Consideration to separate transfer policy but legally any tenant who qualifies under a reasonable preference	N/A

		category must be considered under the main allocation scheme. Section added to allow the council to, where necessary, prioritise a tenant transfer under our landlord function, outside of the main scheme.	
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2.3 There is a legal requirement for the housing authority to have an allocation scheme, that is fit for purpose and reviewed on a regular basis. There is also a requirement that when making changes to the scheme where these constitute major amendments the housing authority must consult with the registered providers in their locality. Historically, we have always considered wider consultation including other providers, tenants and residents and it is anticipated we will do the same of this review too.

2.4 As part of that consultation, it is intended that for some areas of change such as the financial resources, savings, assets and capital, exclusions from joining the register and stronger penalties for refusals will be brought to the attention of the consultees as there is a genuine need to understand the impact of introducing these elements. It is one thing to strengthen your scheme and something else altogether to implement policies that exclude those who need to access the stock from doing so.

2.5 Therefore, it is proposed that Cabinet agree to the draft scheme being released for the draft consultation. Any comments that Cabinet may wish to add as part of the wider consultation will be added to the main feedback and be encompassed into finalised document for implementation.

3.0 **Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations’ officers have considered the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding and Sustainability, and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

3.1 **Equalities Implications**

An equalities impact assessment has been completed for this revised scheme and at this time there are no known implications. This assessment will be updated when the draft scheme is finalised.

3.2 **Financial Implications FIN24-25/2308**

There are currently no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, when the scheme is finalised, and submitted for final approval, a separate report with full financial implications will be presented.

Background Papers and Published Documents
Current Allocation Scheme v4