



## AGENDA ITEM: 10

### SUMMARY

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>March 2015</b>

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Housing Allocations Policy Review</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	James Wilson, Housing Strategy and Policy Officer Julia Hedger, Group Manager Strategic Housing
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Housing Allocations Policy review and all proposed policy amendments
<b>Recommendations</b>	That Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide their feedback for Cabinet to consider in May.
<b>Corporate objectives:</b>	Affordable Housing
<b>Implications:</b>	<u>Financial</u> No financial implications as the proposed policy changes do not require further software development.
<b>'Value For Money Implications'</b>	<u>Value for Money</u> Carrying out a full review of this policy has clear value for money implications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the policy does not comply with legislation then the Council could be vulnerable to legal challenge, which could be very costly.</li> <li>• Lack of clarity in the policy will lead to an unnecessary increase in communication coming into the housing department from residents.</li> <li>• If the policy can assist the Council to reduce letting times this will result in savings to the Council.</li> <li>• By better matching suitable residents to properties with, or suitable for, adaptations, the Council will save money on very expensive installations.</li> </ul>

Risk Implications	<p>The main risks associated with policy amendments relate to communication of changes to residents and the Council's partners. Clarity in the policy will assist the Council if the policy is fully and properly understood by those who have to use it on a day-to-day basis either as applicants, or as the Council's partners who are supporting housing applicants.</p> <p>In addition, procedural changes must be implemented effectively by Council officers to result in improved operations.</p>
Equalities Implications	The Equality Impact Assessment from 2013 has been reviewed and none of the proposed policy changes impact the assessment carried out at that time.
Health And Safety Implications	There are no Health and Safety implications from this report.
Consultees:	<p>Cllr Margaret Griffiths</p> <p>Elliott Brooks - Assistant Director for Housing</p> <p>Julia Hedger - Group Manager for Strategic Housing</p> <p>Natasha Brathwaite - Strategic Housing Team Leader (Property)</p> <p>Gemma Goacher - Property and Allocations Lead Officer</p> <p>All Housing Service Staff</p> <p>Tenants and Leasehold Committee</p> <p>Applicants via Moving with Dacorum website</p> <p>Dacortium Partners via the Homelessness Forum</p>
Background papers:	Cabinet Housing Allocations Report (April 2013)
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	CBL – choice based lettings

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Dacorum Borough Council's current Housing Allocation Policy was approved by the Council in April 2013. System developments to the online portal 'Moving with Dacorum' were required prior to the adoption of the policy, which went live on 7 November 2013.

1.2 The Moving with Dacorum portal:

- Holds all applications,
  - Advertises details of available properties, and
  - Creates shortlists of applicants who have bid for available properties.
- Data on all applicants, properties, and bidding patterns can be extracted from the system in order for the Council to analyse and understand the impact of its policy.

1.3 The Council has committed to carrying out regular reviews of its policy. This first desk top review has been made up of four assessments:

- 1) Assessment of data from Moving with Dacorum to review the impact of the policy on applicants to reassure the Council that the policy is working as expected and having the intended outcomes in terms of point totals and allocations.
- 2) Assessment of appropriateness and adequacy of day-to-day procedures used to implement the policy.
- 3) Assessment of whether the policy in its current form meets sufficiently all legislation and guidance.
- 4) Assessment of feedback gathered over the year from councillors, officers and residents, as well as responses to consultation, including:
  - A formal request for feedback from officers via an email and meeting,
  - An officer snagging list providing a record of procedural issues and policy queries as they have occurred,
  - Consultation questions sent by email to partners and residents and placed on social media, and
  - The Council's Homeless Forum.

## **2) DATA ANALYSIS**

2.1 The headlines below are those findings that have assisted the Council in understanding how its policy is affecting residents, and which can now be used to inform communication to local residents:

- On the 24 November 2014 the active register held 4772 applications and the deferred register held 4624 applications.
- 2225 applications on the active register have never bid, which was higher than expected.
  - Almost 1000 were aged under 30 and 324 were aged over 60.
  - Over 1700 were homeseekers and almost 500 were transfer applicants.
- In the period from November 2013 to November 2014 577 allocations were made (Council and Housing Association properties).
- 44% of applicants housed in this period were housed within six months of registering their application, plus a further 17% within a year.
- On 24 November 2014 77% of applicants were homeseekers, 22% transferring tenants, and 2% homeless households. Of the allocations between November 2013 and November 2014 41% went to homeseekers, 32% to transferring tenants, and 26% to homeless households.
- The point totals required to bid successfully for properties were lower than commonly perceived, depending on property type and location. A number of property types were most commonly allocated to applicants with between 15 and 19 points: three bed flats; three bed maisonettes; and four bed houses.

- The number of bids placed for each property varied greatly (from none to over 200), depending on the property type and location. Applicants with only ten points may bid successfully for properties if they place bids on lower demand property types and locations. There are fewer bids placed on average for sheltered properties compared to general needs.
  - When breaking down allocations between November 2013 and November 2014 by points, the highest proportion went to households with 20-30 points (24% of properties advertised through CBL and 19% of all allocations including direct offers), followed by those who had 40-60 points (16% of properties advertised through CBL and 13% of all allocations including direct offers).
  - On 24 November 2014 2% of individuals on the register had over 100 points, reflected in the allocations made in the period from November 2013 to November 2014, when almost 2% of successful bids were by applicants with over 100 points.
- 2.2 The data analysis has confirmed that the policy has, in general, been operating as the Council intended. If an applicant comes onto the housing register with a housing need and commences bidding there is a good chance they will be housed within six months. Exactly how soon an applicant will be housed depends on the level of housing need, the frequency of bids placed and the type and location of properties bid for.
- 2.3 There is a new recognition of the need to communicate to applicants that they can influence their chance of being housed by changing their bidding patterns.

### 3) PROPOSED POLICY AMENDMENTS

Reason for change	Proposed new wording (deletions crossed out and additions highlighted)
<p><b>Central Government legislation and guidance</b> Addition on advice from the 2014 Lime Legal conference on allocations</p>	<p><b>1.1 The purpose and scope of the policy</b></p> <p>The primary function of this policy is to set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dacorum Borough Council's (the Council) local priorities in allocating housing accommodation; and</li> <li>• The Council's local approach to eligibility and qualification to its housing register.</li> </ul> <p>This document will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish the essential framework enabling the Council to determine the relative priorities between applicants for housing; and</li> <li>• Provide a comprehensive statement of the procedure that should be followed when considering applications and making allocations.</li> </ul> <p>For these purposes 'procedure' includes all aspects of the allocation process, including the persons or descriptions of persons by whom decisions are to be taken, and will set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The procedures and priorities involved in the initial consideration of an applicant's application to the housing register; and</li> <li>• How a bid made by an applicant through the CBL scheme is to be treated.</li> </ul>

This policy has been developed in consultation with strategic partners, registered providers and the general public. The Council will carry out regular reviews taking account of any new changes to legislation or guidance. Where changes are proposed consultation will be carried out with relevant parties.

This policy has been adopted following a full equality impact assessment as specified by the Equality Act 2010 (and reviewed in November 2014).

The Council holds two housing registers, the Active Register for qualifying applicants, and a Deferred Register for non-qualifying applicants (please see 'Qualification' section 3). Applicants on the Active Register are able to bid for available properties by using a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme (please see 'Administration of the housing register' section 2). The Council is committed to giving fair opportunity to all applicants and reserves the right to make limited numbers of properties available to only homeless applicants; or home-seekers; or transferring tenants, if at any time one or more of these groups starts to dominate allocations.

Where this policy refers to the existence of a discretion, this will be assessed by the Assistant Director for Housing. The Council's housing panel has delegated responsibility to award additional priority and make certain exceptions as specified within this policy. The use of discretion will take into account all relevant circumstances relating to a household(s), as well as the demand for and supply of accommodation within Dacorum.

A summary of this policy is available for all members of the public, without charge, at all the Council offices and websites [www.dacorum.gov.uk](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk) and [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk).

**1) Procedural change**

The Council now operates continuous bidding cycles for general needs properties in order to reduce delays in letting properties.

**2) Procedural change**

There are no longer restrictions on the number of properties an applicant can bid on each week due to the introduction of continuous bidding cycles

**2.2 Bidding**

The Moving with Dacorum CBL scheme operates through the partnership's central website [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk).

All properties advertised on this website are available for bidding to all home-seekers and transferring tenants.

The complete bidding process operates through [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk) and applicants will need their login details, which they will have set up at registration.

~~Properties are advertised each week at [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk) and in a newsletter available from the Council offices at Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted Civic Centres and Victoria Hall in Tring.~~

The adverts state:

- The landlord, location, number of bedrooms, rent and other features of the property to help applicants decide which properties are suitable;
- If there are any specific criteria (for example, age criteria for sheltered housing) that applicants must meet to bid on the property;
- If the property is restricted for bidding to homeless applicants, home-seekers or transferring tenants; and
- The end date of the advert.

**2.2.1 General needs property adverts**

General needs property adverts can be placed onto the website on any day Monday to Friday.

A new advert will go live as soon as it has been submitted.

Adverts will remain live for a minimum of three days, closing at one minute to midnight on the final day. If an advert is placed prior to midday, then that day will be counted as the first day.

(For example, a property advert appearing at 10am on a Monday will be open until one minute to midnight on a Wednesday as a minimum).

### 2.2.2 Sheltered property adverts

All sheltered properties will be placed onto the website once a week for five days, from one minute past midnight on a Thursday until one minute to midnight on the following Monday.

Sheltered property adverts will also be available in a newsletter, which can be requested from Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted civic centres and Victoria Hall in Tring.

When an advert closes the Strategic Housing Property team checks the applicants on the shortlist and decide who to offer the property to using the allocation scheme this policy. This allocation scheme policy is in the 'downloads' 'Useful Information' section of [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk) and can be found at [www.dacorum.gov.uk](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk) .

Applicants can bid on up to three any number of properties each week, in the following ways:

- Online at [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk);
- Over the telephone on 0300 111 3570;
- By text message to 07786 201131; and
- In person at the Customer Service Centre at Hemel Hempstead Civic Centre.

Applicants will need to regularly check [www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk](http://www.movingwithdacorum.org.uk) so as not to miss opportunities to bid on properties.

The chance of any active applicant being made an offer will depend on how regularly bids are placed and the types and location of properties bid on.

### Authority change

Direct offers can be used for: homeless offers; adapted properties; and hard-to-let properties. All other direct offers must be approved by the housing panel.

### 2.3 The use of direct offers

A direct offer is defined by the Council as those offers made outside of the CBL scheme, but which are still covered by this policy. In each case where the right to make a direct offer is used it is specified in the table in appendix 1.

Where applicants are not bidding or refuse offers beyond a specified number of cycles, the Council considers that it is reasonable to make direct offers where an offer is considered suitable to meet an applicant's needs.

Direct offers will be used as part of the Council's preventative approach to homelessness. For applicants given a Homelessness Status at the point of receiving the full statutory homelessness duty there will be a presumption to give one direct offer of suitable accommodation (please see 'People who are homeless' section 6.2).

Direct offers may be used to match applicants requiring complex adaptations to suitable properties (please see 'Ground floor and adapted properties' section 7).

In the case of a hard-to-let property (where a property has been advertised at least twice or for more than two weeks without any suitable bids) the Council may make a direct offer.

For applicants in high-risk priority groups it may not be appropriate for applicants to bid, and a sensitive letting may be sought through the making of a direct offer.

	<p>In other cases direct offers may be approved by the housing panel to resolve situations requiring specific lettings.</p>
<p><b>Procedural change</b> The Council has introduced new deadlines and become more pro-active in the verification of applicants' details in order to reduce delays in letting properties.</p>	<p><b>2.4 Checks and Assessment</b></p> <p>Upon receipt of application forms and accompanying documentation the Strategic Housing People team will carry out any appropriate checks. Applications will be considered on the basis of eligibility, qualification, and any additional information provided on the form and supporting documentation.</p> <p>Full verification will be carried out at the point in preparation of for an offer. The Council may also contact any applicant to carry out a verification check if the applicant is active, bidding and has a reasonable chance of receiving an offer within the next six months. In the case that an applicant is a transferring tenant the Council will require access to the current home as part of the verification check.</p> <p>Verification of applicants' details prior to preparation of an offer reduces unnecessary delays between properties becoming ready-to-let and allocations being approved.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of all applicants to make sure that they can verify their details within 48 hours of a verification request. After 48 hours the Council can choose to skip an applicant and look to the next eligible household on any shortlist that the applicant appears on.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of applicants to make sure that the Council has up-to-date telephone and address details.</p>
<p><b>Team structure change</b> The Housing Service now includes a tenancy sustainment team.</p>	<p><b>2.8 Disclosure of information</b></p> <p>The Council will not tell any other members of the public if a person is on its housing register, or give any other information about them.</p> <p>The Council is unable to discuss the details of any application with another member of the public, even members of the applicant's family, without the applicant's written permission. The Council will take reasonable steps to ensure that any member of the public is indeed the applicant before dealing with the enquiry.</p> <p>In certain circumstances, disclosure will become necessary (for example, to prevent and detect fraud, or where an applicant has particular support needs that need to be met in order to enable them to maintain a tenancy). In such cases information could be disclosed to housing officers, the tenancy sustainment team, the corporate anti-fraud team, occupational health officers, doctors, social services, probation services, police, other local authorities, and housing associations, on a need to know basis. This list is not exhaustive.</p> <p>By signing the application form, an applicant is stating his/her agreement with the above.</p>
<p><b>Central Government legislation and guidance</b> Statement required to comply with legislation</p>	<p>2.10 Access to advice and information</p> <p>The Council's Strategic Housing People team provides a free advice and assistance service to all housing applicants and tenants seeking a transfer covering all aspects of the scheme.</p> <p>This includes dealing with enquiries on the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who can apply for housing and how to go about it;</li> <li>• The processes and procedures that an applicant will need to comply with, to successfully register;</li> <li>• How an applicant is likely to be treated under the scheme including the level of priority</li> </ul>

	<p>awarded;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What accommodation an applicant is eligible for, and the chances of receiving an offer, insofar as this can be meaningfully given;</li> <li>• General information to enable an applicant to assess how long it is likely to be before accommodation appropriate to their needs may become available for allocation; and</li> <li>• The lettings process including the functioning of the CBL scheme, offers outside of CBL, and any special circumstances that might be applicable.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Clarification</b> The previous policy did not state the Council's approach to unborn babies</p>	<p><b>3.4 The household</b></p> <p>Non-dependent children (aged 18 or over) or other adults joining the household will be considered as part of the household if they have lived in the property for a minimum of 12 months and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.</p> <p>Dependent adult relatives who have joined the household because they are unable to live independently may be considered as part of the household. Such cases will need to be referred to the Council's independent medical adviser.</p> <p>The Council will check to make sure that any arrangement for access to children does take place and will need to see proof such as court papers or a letter from both parties' solicitors confirming the arrangements between the two parties. A child will not be considered part of the household if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicant has staying contact with the child for less than 50% of the time; or</li> <li>• In the case of equal contact time, the property will not be the child's main or principle home.</li> </ul> <p>A baby will be considered a family member from the date of birth, and not during the pregnancy. However, some housing associations will consider an unborn baby as a family member at the point that the mother receives her MATB1 certificate. For this reason the Council will still take a record of the MATB1, and in these cases an applicant may be able to bid for larger housing association properties prior to the birth.</p> <p>Where the applicant is eligible (as per the criteria in sections 3.2 and 3.3) but there are other, non-eligible individuals living in the property, only dependent children and other dependant family members who are not eligible may be taken into account as part of the household. Any other non-eligible individuals living within the property will not be considered as part of the household.</p>
<p><b>Central Government legislation and guidance</b> Amended to reference multiple codes of guidance</p>	<p><b>4.1 Qualification</b></p> <p>New legislation amending the Housing Act 1996 in the Localism Act 2011, and codes of guidance 2012 (<del>Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local Authorities 2012</del>), has allowed local housing authorities to define criteria for qualification to their housing registers.</p> <p>Dacorum Borough Council has chosen to operate an 'Active Register' as the main housing register for all qualifying applicants and a 'Deferred Register' for all non-qualifying applicants. All applicants on both registers will be written to at the point of registration to confirm their housing register status, and will be required to renew their application every 12 months at least.</p> <p>The criteria relating to qualification are in addition to the eligibility criteria, and do not apply to applicants being made an offer through the Housing Act 1996, Part 7, or where re-housing in specialist accommodation has been agreed on the provision of a future move-on allocation through Part 6. The qualification criteria only apply to applicants, not to their dependents or others in the household, who may appear on the application to be housed with them.</p> <p>In contrast to the eligibility restrictions, while an allocation may not be made to a non-qualifying</p>



	<p>person as a sole applicant, a joint tenancy may be granted as long as both of the joint tenants are eligible, and one of the applicants is an eligible and qualifying person.</p> <p>The qualification criteria are explained in more detail below.</p>
<p><b>1) Clarification</b> Employment criteria clarified.</p> <p><b>2) Policy change</b> A new exemption introduced to permit current tenants to transfer if they have a housing need irrespective of time in the borough.</p> <p><b>3) Policy change</b> Sheltered housing local connection exemption extended to those between 50 and 59 if a medical or social isolation need has been recognised by the housing panel.</p> <p><b>4) Policy change</b> Armed forces exemption extended to those discharged more than five years ago where a case has been approved by the housing panel.</p>	<p><b>4.3 Local connection</b></p> <p>Demand for affordable housing in Dacorum local housing authority area far out-strips supply – both locally and from outside the Borough. The Council has made a commitment through one of its Housing Principles, that: “The Council will maximise the use of our housing stock to meet local priorities”</p> <p>The Council has reflected the above principle by introducing qualification criteria for local connection.</p> <p>To meet the local connection criteria an applicant must have proof of at least one of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 years residency within the Borough at some point in their lifetime;</li> <li>• Family connection where immediate family members (parents, siblings or children) have been continuously resident within the Borough for the last 10 years; or</li> <li>• <b>Currently in permanent employment, of more than 16 hours per week, continuous for the last 24 months. Where the applicants regular place of work is within the Borough.</b></li> <li>• <del>24 months of permanent continuous employment within the Borough of more than 16 hours per week.</del></li> </ul> <p>Applicants who cannot demonstrate a local connection will be placed on the Deferred Register. These applications will have an opportunity for review at a 12 month renewal date.</p> <p><b>The local connection criteria is not required to be met by current council and housing association residents living within the borough.</b></p> <p>The local connection criteria is not required to be met by applicants to sheltered housing aged 60 years and over, <b>or between 50 and 59 if there is a medical or social isolation need that has been recognised by the housing panel.</b> This decision reflects a local need to meet an increasing housing demand from older people requiring specialist housing. <b>These applicants will not be allocated general needs properties.</b></p> <p>The local connection criteria is not required to be met by members of the armed forces and former service personnel, where the housing application is made within 5 years of discharge, including bereaved spouses and civil partners leaving service family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner. <b>Cases where the discharge was long than five years ago will be assessed on a case by case basis by the housing panel.</b> (Please see ‘Armed Forces’ section 4.12).</p> <p>Note: Further local connection criteria are applied to certain villages, however these criteria are applied at the short-listing stage and give priority to applicants with a village connection, rather than ‘qualification’ (please see ‘Village lettings’ section 8).</p>

<p><b>Policy change</b> Exceptions to be considered by housing panel where flexibility will benefit the Council and the meeting of its policy objectives</p>	<p><b>4.7 Rent arrears</b></p> <p>Applicants will not qualify where there is evidence that a member of the household has a property-related arrear owed to the Council, a housing association, or a private rented sector landlord, <i>unless</i> six months of regular repayments have been made.</p> <p>Applicants will also be placed on the Deferred Register if they, or any members of their household:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have been evicted on the grounds of rent arrears from council or housing association property in the last 5 years; or</li> <li>• There is an existing notice or a possession order on the property.</li> </ul> <p>Applicants with a property-related arrear will be placed on the Deferred Register. Due to the nature of the criteria there will be six monthly review opportunities for applicants, to allow for repayments to be reviewed.</p> <p>Property-related arrears will be considered whether from current or former tenancies. <b>Exceptions may be made in circumstances where current council and housing association residents within the borough are downsizing, or where a resident needs to move because the council intends to demolish or carry out major works to their home (this list is not exhaustive). These situations will be considered by the housing panel.</b></p>
<p><b>Policy change</b> Armed forces exemption extended to those discharged more than five years ago where a case has been approved by the housing panel.</p>	<p><b>4.12 Armed forces</b></p> <p>The Council is committed to providing access to housing accommodation to members of the armed forces.</p> <p>Members of the armed forces and former service personnel, making an application for housing within five years of discharge, will qualify to the Council's Active Register whether or not there is a local connection. <b>Cases where the discharge was long than five years ago will be assessed on a case by case basis by the housing panel.</b></p> <p>This includes bereaved spouses and civil partners leaving service family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner.</p> <p>Any lump sum payment made to a current or former member of the armed forces as compensation received for injury or disability sustained in active service will not be included in an assessment of financial means.</p> <p>The Council also recognises its duty to provide additional priority to those members of the armed forces and former service personnel on its Active Register (please see 'Armed Forces priority' section 6.6)</p>
<p><b>1) Policy change</b> Only siblings or step-siblings to be expected to share bedrooms, not other relations or non-relations.</p>	<p><b>5.1 The bedroom standard</b></p> <p>One of the Council's Housing Principles is that: "The Council will maximise the use of our housing stock to meet local priorities".</p> <p>The 'bedroom standard', as defined within the Government's Code of Guidance 2012, will be used to meet this principle.</p> <p>The bedroom standard allocates a separate bedroom to each:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Married or cohabiting couple;</li> <li>- Adult aged 21 years or more;</li> </ul>

<p><b>2) Authority change</b>          Exceptions to the bedroom criteria on medical ground to be considered by the housing panel, rather than going to the Assistant Director for Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pair of children aged 0-20 years of the same sex; and</li> <li>- Pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex.</li> </ul> <p>For the purpose of this policy the reference to children sharing a room shall be considered to mean siblings or step-siblings, not other relations or non-relations.</p> <p>One of the Council's Housing Principles is that: "The Council will maximise the use of our housing stock to meet local priorities".          The Council is committed to ensuring that at the point of allocation households are allocated to properties for which they have the need of all the bedrooms available, while not allocating households to properties where they would be overcrowded.</p> <p>The Council's procedure is to allocate one bedroom (two bed-spaces) to the main applicant on the housing register, and then any partner sharing this bedroom will not receive any further bed-space award. Additional adults and children making up the household will then be allocated bed-space in accordance with the bedroom standard.</p> <p>Exceptions to the bedroom criteria will be considered if medical evidence is provided to the housing panel showing that a member of the household is unable to share a room.</p>
<p><b>Clarification</b>          Status of applicants with no points clarified</p>	<p><b>6.1 How points are used</b></p> <p>Points are given to applicants on the Active Register who meet certain levels of need within the priority categories, plus certain other additional factors (please see 'Points' sections 6.3 – 6.7). At the point of bidding, applicants with the highest points will be considered above otherwise equal applicants.</p> <p>If an applicant does not meet any of the qualification criteria to gain points they will be considered not to qualify for the active register and be placed on the deferred register.</p>
<p><b>Clarification</b>          Bedroom standard to be used to assess best use of rooms, irrespective of actual room use by a household</p>	<p><b>6.3.2 Overcrowding</b></p> <p>The Council uses the 'bedroom standard' that came from the Code of Guidance 2012 in defining its bedroom criteria. The bedroom criteria determine which properties applicants may bid for dependent on the size of their household (please see 'Bedroom criteria' section 5.1).</p> <p>The Government recommends that this standard is used to provide an appropriate definition of overcrowding to meet modern expectations.</p> <p>The Council will give additional priority to those applicants who are overcrowded, according to the bedroom standard.</p> <p>Overcrowded applicants will receive a set points total for each bed-space by which the household is overcrowded (please see table in appendix 1).</p> <p>The points the Council gives for overcrowding are to reflect the stress and anxiety arising from this situation. Therefore the Council would not expect applicants to also meet additional priority welfare criteria for reasons of overcrowding (please see 'Medical and welfare' section 6.4).</p> <p>These points may not reflect how an applicant's household actually make use of the bedrooms within their house, but how the rooms could best be made use of in accordance with the bedroom standard (please see 'Bedroom criteria' section 5.1).</p>
<p><b>Central Government legislation and</b></p>	<p><b>6.3.3 Under-occupation</b></p> <p>One of the Council's Housing Principles is that: "The Council will maximise the use of our</p>

**guidance**

Updated to reflect that housing benefit regulations are now in force

housing stock to meet local priorities”.

To reflect this principle the Council incentivises its tenants currently under-occupying their homes to downsize (please see the Council’s Under-occupation Policy).

~~In addition, at this time Central Government is proposing to introduce new bedroom eligibility criteria for housing benefit claimants below the pension credit qualifying age, to take effect from April 2013. These regulations will~~ In addition, new under-occupancy regulations contained in the Welfare Reform Act 2012, and brought into force in April 2013, impact how much rent a household can claim through housing benefit, depending on how many of the bedrooms within the dwelling they are eligible to have.

For the purposes of housing benefit (where the claimant is below pension credit qualifying age) ~~these proposed regulations will mean that from April 2013 one bedroom will be~~ is allowed for each person or couple living as part of the household with the following exceptions:

- A child of 15 or under will be expected to share with another child of the same sex; and
- A child of 9 or under will be expected to share with one other child aged 9 or under, regardless of sex.

No exemption or account ~~will be~~ is taken of children whose main residence is elsewhere. ~~When the regulations come into effect in April 2013~~ Households under-occupying their properties, and in receipt of housing benefit (where the claimant is below pension credit qualifying age), are likely to experience financial hardship. The Council considers that this situation will make their housing condition unsatisfactory.

The regulations ~~will~~ affect:

- Cases where single tenants and couples in receipt of housing benefit (where the claimant is below pension credit qualifying age) are continuing to live in a family home after some or all of their children move away; and
- Cases where a family in receipt of housing benefit (where the claimant is below pension credit qualifying age) may be occupying all bedrooms, but the new regulations require two of the household to now share.

The Council will provide points (please see table in appendix 1) for under-occupation for each bedroom a household is under-occupying, according to the bedroom eligibility criteria for housing benefit. This will apply equally to all households whether or not they are in receipt of housing benefit.

To incentivise single tenants and couples downsizing from three, four and five bedroom properties, a household that is under-occupying by two bedrooms will be able to bid for properties with one bedroom above their need (please also see ‘The bidding process’ section 5.2).

Note: If applicants in receipt of housing benefit (where the claimant is below pension credit qualifying age) are under-occupying by two bedrooms, and choose to move to a property with one bedroom more than their needs, there will continue to be some shortfall in their rent under the new regulations. The Council gives all tenants the right to make this decision based on their own personal situation as tenants will be required to pay any remaining shortfall in their rent.

All other applicants in receipt of under-occupation points, where they are under-occupying by one bedroom, will only be able to bid for those properties with the number of bedrooms for which they are eligible. For example, in the case of an applicant with two daughters, both under 15 years of age, occupying separate bedrooms in a three bedroom house, the applicant will only be able to bid for two bedroom properties.

<p><b>Team structure change</b> The Housing Service now includes a tenancy sustainment team and the team leader forms part of the housing panel</p>	<p><u>6.4.2 Welfare grounds</u></p> <p>The Council will award additional priority on welfare grounds when there is evidence that it is the current housing condition of the applicant, or a member of their household, which itself creates a particular need for the applicant to move.</p> <p>The Council considers ‘welfare grounds’ to refer to care and support needs or other social needs that do not require medical care or support.</p> <p>The additional priority will be awarded as points (please see table in appendix 1) based on meeting criteria for one of four categories to reflect the level of risk to the applicant, or a member of their household, from remaining in the current accommodation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>extreme; high; medium; and low.</li> </ul> <p>Where appropriate, information is to be sought in the first instance from relevant professionals involved in an applicant’s case.</p> <p>Welfare cases are to be presented to and assessed by an internal Housing Panel made up of the following staff representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group Manager – Tenants and Leaseholders or Group Manager – Strategic Housing;</li> <li>Team Leader – Tenants and Leaseholders;</li> <li>Team Leader – Income Management;</li> <li>Strategic Housing Team Leader (People) or Strategic Housing Team Leader (Property); and</li> <li>Team Leader – Property and Place (Tenancy Sustainment Team Leader).</li> </ul> <p>The Council considers ‘welfare grounds’ to include (this list is not exhaustive):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic violence; Harassment; Threat of violence; Relationship breakdown; Social isolation; No or limited access to facilities; Access to child care; Caring responsibilities (with proof of receipt of Carers’ Allowance); Adoption and fostering; and Issues associated with culture and/or identity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1) Policy change</b> Points are now available to applicants over 60 wanting to move from bedsits into sheltered.</p> <p><b>2) Clarification</b> Points given to applicants moving from bedsits into sheltered, or from Category 1 to Category</p>	<p><b>6.7 Other additional priority criteria</b></p> <p>The Council is committed to recognising a number of other criteria and in all cases the additional priority will be awarded as points (see table in appendix 1).</p> <p>The additional priority criteria are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing tenants of sheltered accommodation who wish to move from a Category 1 to Category 2 or existing tenants aged 60 or over in general needs bedsit accommodation who wish to move into sheltered accommodation (where there is a medical condition present these 25 points are in addition to any given on medical grounds, as they are to reflect the applicant’s feelings and social needs);</li> <li>Children in flats without a lift (first floor and above only);</li> <li>Applicants meeting the qualifying criteria for the Active Register who have also completed a pre-tenancy training course;</li> <li>Existing tenants at the end of their Flexible Tenancy who have been assessed as needing to transfer to meet a change in housing need; and</li> <li>Length of time on the Active Register.</li> </ul>

2, are in addition to any medical points to reflect social needs.

**Policy change and procedural clarity**  
The Council is now allocating adapted properties through the CBL system except in extreme cases where direct offers will be used. The amendment provides procedural clarity relating to how this will be achieved.

**7. Ground-floor and Adapted properties**

~~In drawing the short-list for a ground floor or adapted property, applicants with a specific need for the type of property will be considered above applicants without any specific need before points are taken into account.~~

~~If there are no bids made by applicants with a specific need for the type of property being advertised, the allocation will be offered to the applicant who has bid with the highest level of points.~~

Due to the low number of properties available in the borough that are suitable to meet the needs of people who have mobility and physical health conditions, the Council is committed to making sure that people who need adapted properties are prioritised for them. In order to achieve this the Council has introduced three 'levels' (low, medium and high, please see Appendix 2), that correspond to both applicants and properties. The property adverts on the bidding system 'Moving with Dacorum' will identify which homes meet one of the three levels.

Applicants will be advised to only bid on those properties that state on their adverts that they will be suitable for their needs. This will limit the number of properties these applicants bid on, but applicants will be prioritised for any suitable properties that they do bid for.

Applicants with mobility and physical health needs receive medical points, awarded using criteria based on guidelines provided by Occupational Therapists (professional experts in the housing needs of people with mobility and physical health conditions), and these points relate to the extent to which an applicant's current housing situation cannot meet their mobility or physical health needs.

Those applicants who bid on a 'low', 'medium' or 'high' property will be shortlisted according to the following priority order:

- 'Low' properties
  - 1st 'Low' applicants
  - 2nd People with no specific need.
  
- 'Medium' properties
  - 1st 'Medium' applicants
  - 2nd 'Low' applicants
  - 3rd People with no specific need.
  
- 'High' properties
  - 1st 'High' applicants
  - 2nd 'Medium' applicants
  - 3rd 'Low' applicants
  - 4th People with no specific need.

From the prioritised shortlist the Council will allocate to the person with the highest points.

There is also a fourth category, 'extreme', for those applicants with very complex needs, where only very few properties would be appropriate for the extent of adaptations required. In these



	cases the Council will make use of direct offers to allocate appropriately.
<p><b>Clarification</b> Employment criteria clarified.</p>	<p><b>8. Village lettings</b></p> <p>In drawing the short-list for a village property, applicants with a local connection to the specific village (within Dacorum area) will be considered above applicants without a local connection, where they meet the following criteria (applied using a cascade approach and listed in priority order):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 years residency within the village at some point in their lifetime;</li> <li>• Family connection where immediate family members (parents, siblings or children) have been continuously resident within the village for the last 10 years; or</li> <li>• Currently in permanent employment, of more than 16 hours per week, continuous for the last 24 month. Where the applicants regular place of work is within the Borough.</li> <li>• 24 months of permanent continuous employment within the village of more than 16 hours per week.</li> </ul> <p>If there are no bids made by applicants with a connection to the village within which the property is located, the same cascade approach will be applied to those living and/or working in neighbouring parishes.</p>
<p><b>1) Policy change</b> Applicants younger than 50 will no longer be considered for sheltered housing irrespective of need.</p> <p><b>2) Policy change</b> All sheltered housing properties will be advertised to over 60s before being considered for applicants between 50 and 59.</p>	<p><b>10. Sheltered Housing and Flexi Care</b></p> <p>Sheltered housing properties are designed for people aged 60 or over, or for younger applicants of any age Applicants aged between 50 and 59, if there is a medical or social isolation need that has been recognised by the housing panel, will be considered only where a property has first been advertised to applicants over 60. Sheltered housing will be available to applicants who wish to transfer and downsize from a general needs property or can demonstrate in an assessment that they require the level of housing related support offered in this type of accommodation.</p> <p>Applicants to sheltered housing are exempt from the local connection criteria, however at the point of shortlisting applicants who have a local connection will be prioritised before points are taken into consideration. This is to reflect the Council's commitment to prioritising local housing need.</p> <p>Flexi Care sheltered housing services provide an alternative form of care for older people whose needs are beyond the provision available within traditional sheltered housing. A Flexi Care Housing Panel will determine and prioritise the housing related support and care needs of applicants. (Further information can be found in the Flexi Care policy).</p>

#### 4. COMMUNICATION TO RESIDENTS

The Council will communicate policy changes and findings from the data analysis to residents and partners of the Council. As a result of consultation the Council also recognises that it needs to invest in communication that:

- Tackles the perception that the first bidder will be considered first for a property being advertised.
- Further explains why points changed in November 2013 and why there are no points for local connection.
- Further explains why different ages are used to define overcrowding and under-occupancy.

## **5. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide their feedback prior to a report to Cabinet in May.