



AGENDA ITEM: 8

SUMMARY

Report for:	Housing and Communities Overview & Scrutiny
Date of meeting:	5th December 2012
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Principles of the new Housing Allocations Policy
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing Julia Hedger – Strategic Housing Group Manager
Purpose of report:	1. To update members on the progress of the review of the Housing Allocations Policy 2. To update members on the proposed new principles forming the basis of the new Housing Allocations Policy
Recommendations	1. That members comment and note the new principles forming the basis of the new Housing Allocations Policy
Corporate objectives:	Affordable Housing
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> The Abrisas allocations system will need to be updated in line with the new allocations policy. The first meeting with Abrisas to discuss potential costs is due to take place in December and an update can be provided at the next meeting.
Risk Implications	Risk Assessment will be completed when the draft report is presented
Equalities Implications	Equality Impact Assessment will be completed when the draft report is presented
Health And Safety Implications	None

Consultees:	<p>Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing</p> <p>Cllr Janice Marshall – Chair of H&C OSC</p> <p>Cllr Mahmood – Vice chair of H&C OSC</p> <p>Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration</p> <p>Elliott Brooks – Assistant Director Housing</p> <p>Andy Vincent – Group Manager Tenants & Leaseholders</p>
Background papers:	<p>Strategic Tenancy Policy – consultations draft March 2012</p> <p>Housing Principles – March 2012</p> <p>CLG guidance – Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities in England June 2012</p>
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>STP - Strategic Tenancy Policy</p> <p>CBL – Choice based lettings</p> <p>CLG – (Dept) Communities and Local Government</p> <p>TLC – Tenants and Leaseholders Committee</p>

Background

The current Housing Allocations Policy was approved by Cabinet October 2011 and adopted on 1st December 2011.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced the requirement to produce a Strategic Tenancy Policy by January 2013. The Act also gave Councils new freedoms to allow Councils to manage their Housing registers in a different way and to promote mobility for existing social tenants.

This came into force on 18th June 2012 and the Government produced new guidance to local authorities to help inform the basis of their new Allocation schemes. Although the changes in Allocations included in the Localism Act came into force in June 2012, Councils were not required to amend their policies immediately; although the guidance recommends Allocations Policies are reviewed in a timely manner.

The proposed time line for the Councils new Allocations Policy is as follows –

- Sept/Oct 2012 - Member/staff working group discussed principles of new Allocations policy (Cllr Margaret Griffiths, Cllr Janice Marshall and Cllr Mahmood)
- Dec 2012 – Principles developed by staff and Member working group presented to H&C OSC for discussion
- Jan 2013 – New draft policy based on the principles presented to TLC on 14th January, followed by Cabinet on 22nd January and H&C OSC on 23rd January.
- 24th Jan for 8 weeks - Public consultation begins on the new draft policy

- March – recommended for Cabinet approval, the new Allocations Policy including the comments from Consultation
- March – update to H&C OSC
- April – recommendation to full Council to adopt new policy with immediate effect.

Attached as appendix 1 is the current points system, appendix 2 is an updated version of the proposed new point's scheme for comparison.

The main changes to the new proposed scheme are as follows –

Eligibility to join the Housing Register – applicants with a local connection (as defined in appendix 2) will be placed on an active register and will be able to bid for properties. Applicants with no local connection will be placed on a deferred list and will not be eligible to bid. This is to protect local applicants with a long connection to the Borough.

Applicants who own a property will be placed on the deferred list unless aged 60 and over. These applicants over 60 will be eligible to bid for sheltered housing only.

The age for eligibility to sheltered housing has been amended to age 60 only, unless a younger applicant has a substantial need for support as approved by the Council's medical advisor.

Applicants with no identified housing need (someone not within a reasonable preference category as defined by the Housing Act 1996) will be placed on the deferred list.

Local Connection requirements – this has been strengthened to ensure applicants with a local connection are given priority for local housing. This criterion includes members of the armed forces and former service personnel when an application is made within 5 years of discharge. This is in line with the CLG guidance on allocations (para 3.27)

The rest of the updated point's scheme includes an explanation on each section to provide clarity at this stage. When the draft policy is written much of the explanation will be included in the actual policy document e.g. most of the additional factors section will be separated and grouped within the policy, so the point's scheme is clear for applicants on the active register.

Homelessness – applicants who are “statutory homeless” and accepted onto the Housing Register for housing will be awarded a status rather than a set number of points. This is to prevent “points chasing”. Homeless status will be awarded for 4 CBL cycles (currently 6) and then a direct offer (currently a priority card is extended and is not clear on the policy of direct offers.)

Private sector condition of property – this states clearly that Council and Housing association properties are excluded from this points award on the basis that “social” housing properties should not be in such a poor condition to warrant an award of points from this category. This category has been split into 2 – low and high award.

Overcrowding – for the purpose of the new policy members of the same household are considered “children” until eldest reaches age 21. This is in line with the new

guidance and the new benefits legislation due to be in place by April 2013 – social housing size criteria.

For children sharing a bedroom of different genders points will be awarded at age 10+ (rather than in two stages currently). Again this reflects the guidance and changes in benefit eligibility.

Children in flats – this has been clarified to confirm if a lift is available then points will not be awarded, and the award is only applicable to families with younger children.

Under occupation – These points have increased to ensure applicants living in larger properties who wish to move to a smaller property can, and would be at the top of any shortlist for properties which they have shown an interest in. Linked with the tenants transfer scheme applicants moving from larger homes to a smaller one can now move to a property with 1 more bedroom than their requirement.

Medical points – this has been split into 4 groups now, and clarity of the policy has been added.

Social and welfare points – this has been split into 4 groups to align with the medical points. These points will be awarded by the Councils Housing Panel using criteria to ensure consistency.

Additional factors – the majority of this section will be included within the policy itself rather than in the points scheme in the new policy. It is proposed that applicants who fit within one of the additional factor criteria will be placed on the deferred list rather than having points deducted from their active application.

The additional factors section will clearly set out how different groups of applicants will be allocated housing or who will be excluded (i.e. no local connection). This is to strengthen the current policy rather than doing anything in a different way.

Length of time on register points – this award has been reduced to reflect the Councils strategic housing direction of providing homes for those in greatest need, rather than those who have just waited a long time for a property.