

Allocations Policy Review – Consultation Results

Introduction

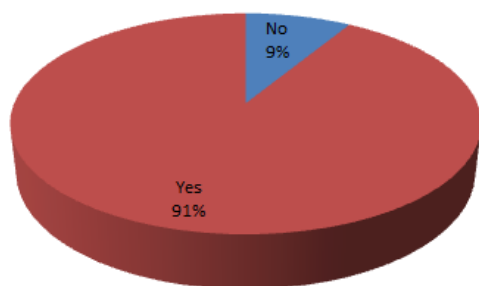
Under the review of the allocations policy, consultations on the proposed changes were carried out via an online survey with applicants currently active on the housing register and new tenants who have recently been through the allocations process, now settled in their new home. Focus groups were also held with staff from across the housing service to gain their thoughts on the proposals. This report covers the results from these consultations.

Survey Results – Active Applicants (Sample size = 46)

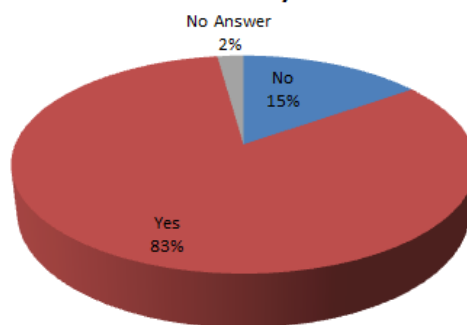
Accessibility of the Allocations Policy

A large majority of the applicants surveyed had read the allocations policy in its current format. Of the 91% who had read it, 11% noted that they were still unclear as to what they were entitled to.

...Have read the current allocations policy?



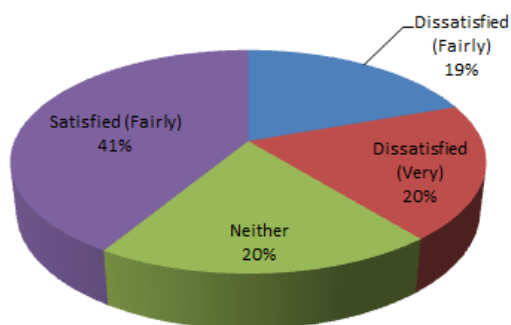
...Were clear on what they were entitled to?



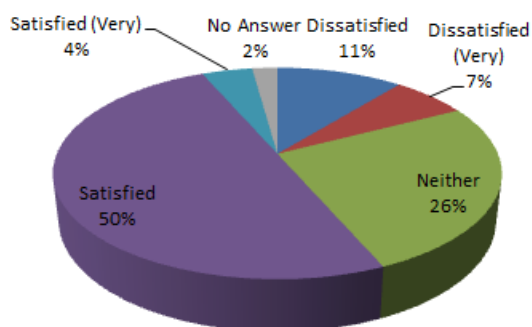
Property Adverts

The survey addressed the properties available on 'Moving with Dacorum' and the way these are advertised by asking how satisfied applicants were with:

...The choice of properties available to bid on?



...Information provided in the property adverts?



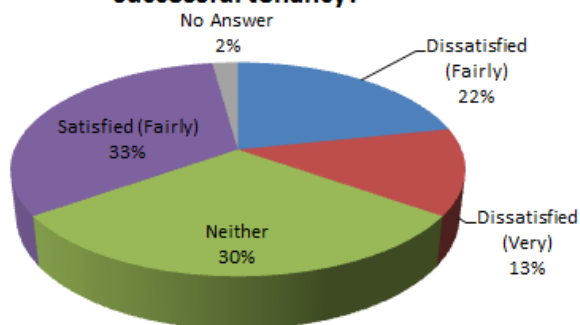
When asked how we could improve the information provided in the adverts, the suggestions made can be summarized as the following:

- More information re. the location of the property (include postcodes)
- Include information about the layout of the property and room sizes
- More photos of the property (internal and external)

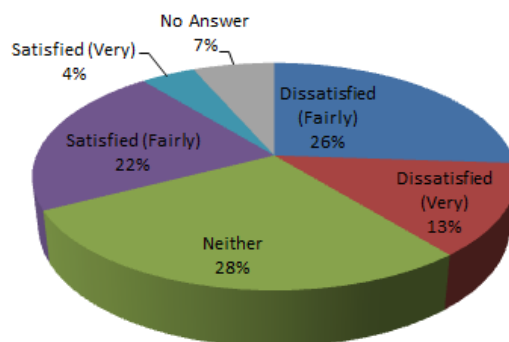
Advice and Information Provided

Applicants were asked how satisfied they were with:

...Access to advice and information on having a successful tenancy?



...Access to alternative options?

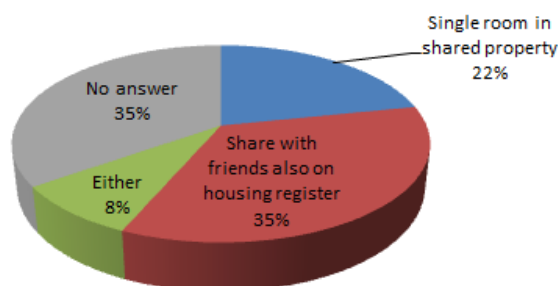


Shared Accommodation

Due to changes in legislation meaning that housing benefit for under 35's is reducing to a single room rate, it may be necessary for the council to consider the use of houses of multiple occupancy in order to provide affordable accommodation for single applicants. Of those surveyed, 50% were single applicants.

Of the single applicants who responded to this survey, the following applies:

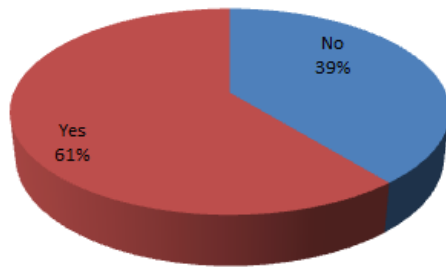
...Would you consider shared accommodation? If so, which type?



Refusing A Property

Applicants were asked whether if successful in bidding for a property, should applicants be allowed to refuse it, the result was as follows:

Should applicants who have successfully bid on a property be able to refuse it?



Additional Thoughts

Respondents to this survey were given the opportunity to make any additional comments regarding the allocation or bidding process. These are summarized below:

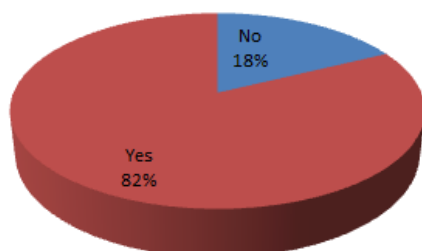
- More support should be offered throughout the process for those suffering from mental illness
- Make the system fairer so that downsizers don't have an unfair advantage
- Make the system more transparent when it comes to direct offers
- Automated messages would be useful, notifying an applicant of successful / unsuccessful bids

Survey Results – New Tenants (Sample size = 17)

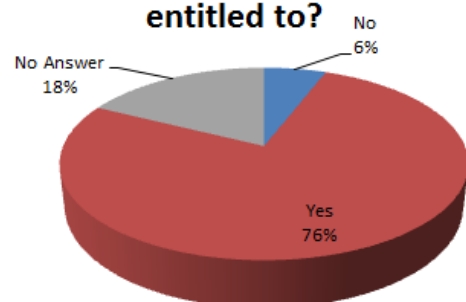
Accessibility of the Allocations Policy

Again, as with bidding applicants, a large majority of new tenants surveyed had read the allocations policy prior to starting the bidding process. Of the 82% who had read it, 6% stated that they were still unclear as to what they were entitled to.

...Had read the allocations policy before bidding?



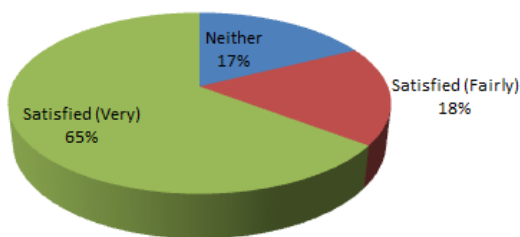
...Were clear on what they were entitled to?



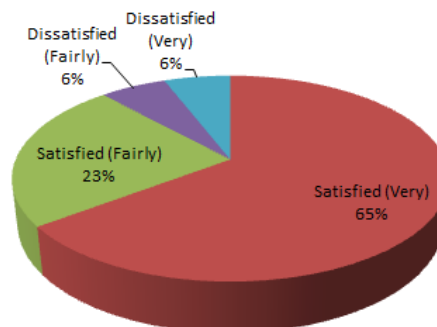
Bidding Process & Property Adverts

The survey addressed the properties available on 'Moving with Dacorum' and the way these are advertised, as well as the bidding process by asking how satisfied those surveyed were with:

...The information provided in the property adverts?



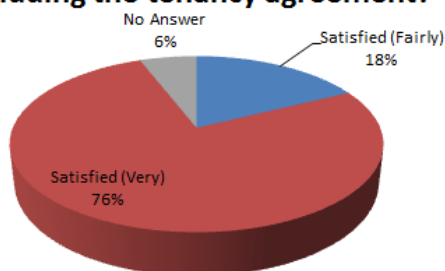
...The ability to choose a property?



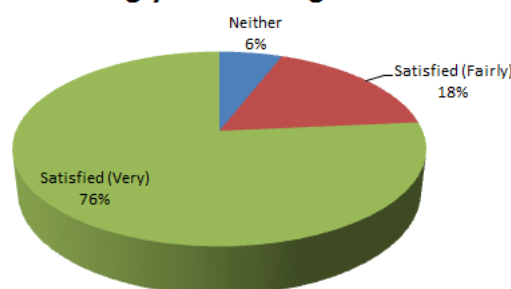
Starting a Tenancy

We asked new tenants about their experience of starting a new tenancy and how satisfied they were with the following:

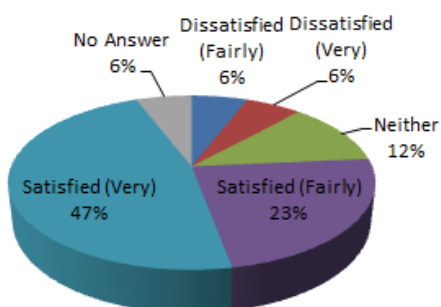
...Your introduction to your tenancy, including the tenancy agreement?



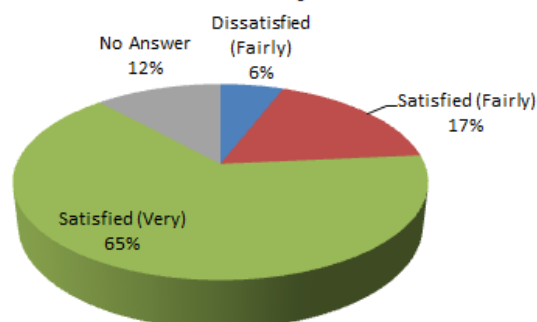
...Meeting your housing officer?



...Any additional support put in place to help you have a successful tenancy?



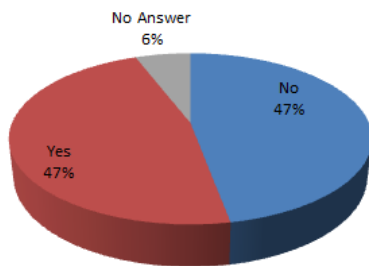
...Your overall experience of starting a new tenancy?



Refusing a Property

New tenants were asked whether if successful in bidding for a property, should applicants be allowed to refuse it, the result was as follows:

Should applicants who have successfully bid on a property be able to refuse it?



Additional Thoughts

Respondents to this survey were given the opportunity to make any additional comments regarding the allocation, bidding or new tenancy process. These are summarized below:

- Support and advice given was helpful and queries were responded to quickly
- Some dissatisfaction with the lack of choice offered when having to take a direct offer

Staff Consultation

Focus groups were held with staff from across the housing service to gain their thoughts on the proposed changes to the allocations policy. See below table for a summary of these focus groups.

<u>Issue Identified</u>	<u>Proposed Change</u>	<u>Staff Feedback</u>
Applicants not making informed choices when bidding due to option of bidding on unlimited number of properties. This leads to refusals and high workload when shortlisting.	Remove the opportunity to refuse all together. This will encourage more strategic bidding and therefore less bids overall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's important for tenants to be happy in their property, suggest a limit on the number of bids allowed per week instead. • More information about the property would need to be included in the adverts i.e. more photos. • Suggest a slow launch of this change, drop to 2 refusals allowed for a year and then review before dropping to 1 etc. • Consider sheltered housing applicants being exempt.
No clear stance in the policy around when a child is considered to be part of a household due to custody changes.	If custody has been decided by a court then a child should immediately be considered a member of the household. If custody is agreed through choice of the parents then proof of the child living there for at least 6 months should be required (documentation as requested by Housing Benefit).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff involved in the focus group agreed with this proposal.
Transfer applicants are currently able to take part in the tenancy sustainment course and gain 5 extra points.	Anyone who is on the active register as a new tenant and completes the training should receive 5 points. Transfer tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancy officers all agreed that this would be beneficial in reducing ASB and rent arrears. • Staff felt that it was important that the course not been

	should not receive points; however those with tenancy breaches should have to complete the course as a compulsory measure.	seen as a tick box exercise for more points, work should be done to ensure applicants are really engaging.
Applications for those living in Mother and Baby units have to go via Housing Panel which can be time-consuming and slow down the process	Remove direct offers as an option. Instead, a high number of points should be awarded at an early stage (e.g. 3 months) in order for applicant to start bidding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk assessments should be carried out first to ensure correct support can be put in place as needed (e.g. tenancy sustainment team referral). • Staff were conscious of the need for a clear process for this i.e. would applications need to go via Housing Panel or can it be considered at team level?
No clarification in the current policy around whether step-siblings should be required to share a bedroom.	Non-blood related children should not be expected to share a bedroom; however applicants should be encouraged to consider affordability re. Social sector size criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff generally felt that this should be considered on a case by case basis.
Nothing currently in the policy which prevents under 50's from moving into supported housing accommodation with a family member if it is more than 1 bedroom.	As this is such a rare occurrence, it should be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, clear rules around succession should be in place - succession of the tenancy should be allowed but alternative accommodation will be allocated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were conscious that this could cause ASB issues and other tenancy issues once the main applicant passes away. • Concerns around the impact on the scheme environment and dynamics if younger people were able to live there. • Could potentially make hard to let sheltered housing properties even harder to let.
Nothing in the policy which covers whether or not friends should be allowed to form a household.	Further research needed. How common is this? How much of an appetite for this is there?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does give more options for single applicants, especially with the LHA cap. • Some staff were concerned about potential impact on tenancy issues i.e. ASB.
Administration and management of the deferred register (application renewals etc.) impacts staff time and workloads.	People should be deleted after 3 years on the deferred register. Those who have been on it for a long time should be written to prior to being deleted informing them that they should contact us if their circumstances change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff felt that there shouldn't be a deferred register at all, as this can give false hope to applicants waiting on it.
Currently if someone has large rent arrears they are able to move if they stick to a payment plan for 6 months. E.g. £3000 arrears, paying back £10 a month for 6 months. Still leaves large arrears.	Rule tightening should be looked into; however this should focus more on payment behavior than actual amounts. If they are in arrears then the tenancy sustainment course should be compulsory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some staff felt that applicants with high arrears should only be able to move out of necessity not preference. • Consider introducing a % of arrears that applicants will need to pay off before being moved. • Some staff felt that individual circumstances can play such a pivotal role that it should be considered on a case by case basis.
Current incentives for downsizing offer 45 points per extra bedroom which means that a sole tenant in a 3 bed house is given 90	Need for a review of downsizing incentives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider reducing the number of points given for each spare room.

points. They are then able to bid on (and are often top of the list for) 2 bed properties - our biggest need.