

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

3 July 2023

Housing Allocation Policy Review 2023

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr J Somper, Adult Social Care, Health and Housing

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: V Broadhurst, Executive Director of People - Adults

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

1. Dorset Council approved the current housing allocation policy in July 2021. A formal review after 2 years is the subject of this report.
2. The Dorset Council Housing Allocation policy is a choice-based scheme that describes how the council will meet its statutory duty to operate and manage its housing register. The policy includes statutory and discretionary reasonable preferences arranged across 4 different bands that reflect the prioritisation of the applicants assessed housing need and has 6 overarching scheme aims.
3. The implementation of the policy was timed to coincide with a new software system and began in December 2021. All applicants needed to re-register.
4. The portfolio holder for housing approved some minor amendments in March 2022 in accordance with delegated authority.

5. This formal review uses the information available from the 4686 applications assessed over the period December 2021 to May 2023, feedback gathered from housing reviews, complaints, enquiries, the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan tasks, and other information available to the housing service.

Recommendation:

1. The committee receive the review and support the further work identified.
2. The committee support the implementation of the minor amendments identified.

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure service users benefit from the review findings.

1. Review Findings

- 1.1 The review identifies recommended minor amendments, future areas of focus and explains how the scheme aims are met.
- 1.2 Appendices attached provide detailed examination of:
 - a) Appendix 1 – Scheme Aims
 - b) Appendix 2 – Changes Introduced by the Policy
 - c) Appendix 3 – Feedback
 - d) Appendix 4 – Minor Amendments
- 1.3 The policy harmonised previous arrangements into one scheme for the whole Dorset Council area and introduced 6 scheme aims. The review identified the aims of the scheme are met.
- 1.4 The review identified the policy is supporting homeless households who achieved 47% of all lets.
- 1.5 Local connection is operating as expected. Applicants are bidding for homes outside the area they currently live in although bid to let ratio is low. The policy is effective in integrating mechanisms relating to specific local connection requirements (such as S106 planning requirements) and ensuring homes are prioritised for applicants living in a specific vicinity where appropriate.

1.6 The policy provides flexibility to temporarily prioritise bids from specific cohorts. This mechanism has been used for homeless households and could be used to support other applicants when there is an identified need or development:

- i) Keyworkers
- ii) Foster carers and/or adopters
- ii) Supported housing and ready to move on

2. Review Suggestions for Further Work

2.1 The review identified tasks the housing service could undertake to improve the data or promote the scheme.

2.2 One reasonable preference category appears underrepresented because there are no households with this assessed housing need. The housing service can conduct further work to:

- a) promote with social landlords the reasonable preference category in Band B for social tenants living in an adapted property (where the adaptations are no longer required) because there have been no applications assessed as meeting this housing need.

2.3 The number of applications assessed as meeting a Band D low housing need with housing related debt reasonable preference is lower than anticipated. Households are likely to be assessed with a higher reasonable preference as well but should be included in this data. Social landlords have various policies regarding housing related debt and this information could be used to identify these households, ensure appropriate support has been offered and encourage the applicants to become tenancy ready at the earliest opportunity. The housing service can conduct work to:

- a) reconcile all applications with housing related debt.

2.4 The analysis identified Band D Low Housing Need includes households who have met a homelessness category and could be excluded from this low housing need category. The housing service can conduct work to:

- a) reconcile all homeless households with a band d low housing need assessment and amend where appropriate.
- 2.5 The current financial resource limit has been reviewed and compared to other neighbouring housing authorities. A full description is found in appendix 3. Current increases in levels of homeless approaches, linked pressures around affordability due to the current cost of living crisis and calls for government to review local housing allowance rates have been taken into consideration and this review does not recommend a change the current limits at this time. The housing service could consider changing the financial resource limit at an appropriate time and would need to carry out a further exercise prior to the next review:
- a) investigate methods to increase related data intelligence and include in the next formal review.
- 2.6 The number of households who are social tenants who are currently under- occupying and have applied to the housing register could be increased releasing larger family homes which are in short supply. It is possible that changing the current policy to allow these households to bid for smaller homes that are still higher than their assessed bed need could improve this turnover. The housing service should:
- a) conduct a study to determine the likely success of this change and negotiate support with social landlords.

3. Minor Amendments

- 3.1 The full list of minor amendments is found at appendix 4.
- 3.2 These amendments to the policy have been identified because clarification or expansion of the existing wording would be helpful to applicants; to meet the identified outcomes of the homeless and rough sleeping strategy actions or to make internal processes more efficient:
- a) expand informative text to the policy to explain how specific planning or other requirements impact on the general local connection criteria.
 - b) expand guidance in policy about rent arrears.

- c) expand guidance in policy about financial resources limit and deprivation of capital activities.
- d) expand guidance in policy about deliberately worsening circumstances and include examples.
- e) expand guidance in policy about housing disrepair.

4. **Financial Implications**

None

5. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

None

6. **Well-being and Health Implications**

There are no recommendations related to medical or welfare housing needs. The policy is providing access to social housing and prioritising appropriately. The policy includes mechanisms to provide updated information for applicants whose circumstances change.

7. **Other Implications**

None

8. **Risk Assessment**

- 8.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

9. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The approved equality impact assessment linked to the policy identified applicants who meet the service personnel criteria as of special interest. A commitment was made to 'improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces and apply the service manager's discretion'. Data about service personnel applications is in appendix 2.

This review makes no recommendations for material amendments.

10. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Review of Scheme Aims

Appendix 2 – Review of Changes Introduced by the Policy

Appendix 3 – Review of Feedback

Appendix 4 – Recommended Minor Amendments

11. **Background Papers**

The current Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy is found [here](#)