

Appendix 1 - Aims of the Scheme

The Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy describes our choice based letting scheme that supports our duty to maintain and manage our housing register for social housing in the Dorset Council area. It is underpinned by 5 scheme aims:

- a) To ensure people understand their housing options and have an informed choice about where they live.
- b) To help create mixed and sustainable communities.
- c) To help social tenants be more mobile in where they live and work.
- d) To meet all legal requirements and be flexible and responsive to changes.
- e) A scheme for local people that is fair, modern, and easy to use.

This review has considered how the scheme aims are supported and/or impacted by the practical application of the housing allocation policy. The outcome of this work is described below together with any recommendations.

Aim: To ensure people understand their housing options and have an informed choice about where they live.

Local Connection

The policy has a local connection criterion that applies to the whole of the area. There are standard exceptions to this for specific cohorts. This means applicants who are eligible can bid for properties anywhere in the Dorset Council area.

We balance choice and housing need by prioritising all applicant's housing needs and considering any specific criteria the social landlord may have and any restrictions in either a local letting plan or other planning requirement.

Our review identified a small number of complaints that directly related to local connection. These indicated a misunderstanding about general local connection and specific local connection requirements for individual properties or new build sites where any existed.

Recommendation: Add more information in the policy to explain the difference.

Bidding

New software has been implemented that allows registered providers and the housing service to include detailed information about each home and local services the property letting advertisement.

Applicants have relevant information to make appropriate choices about which home to bid for.

Earlier software had made it possible for applicants to make bids on homes that did not meet their housing needs. The current software allows applicants to bid on the homes that could meet their housing needs only. This function helps to manage the register effectively and ensure applicants are clear about their choice of properties.

Aim: To help create mixed and sustainable communities.

Enabling Team

Information from the housing register is available to the Housing Enabling and Delivery Team who work with others to bring forward new affordable homes. The data is used to help promote the development of new homes that meet the needs of those on our register data. Information can include:

- location
- size of home
- type of home (accessible)
- age related (older people)

Local connection

Some households are exempt from meeting the general local connection criterion. These include the following cohorts:

- Homeless (various)
- Armed Forces (various)
- Older People (restricted to hard to let or sheltered housing)
- Transient people
- Rough Sleepers

Without these exemptions these households may be unable to meet the general local connection and could not bid on homes under this scheme.

Specialist Needs

In 'S18 Property Ownership' the policy describes that in general people who own their own home are excluded from the scheme. However, it also describes those households who are not excluded.

Allowing some households who own their own homes to access the housing register where they require specialist housing due to a medical condition or disability and their current accommodation cannot be adapted helps create mixed a sustainable community where households have a range of housing needs. Data from the register is used at consultation stages of new affordable housing developments to support the provision of the right type of home in the right location according to the housing needs of our community.

Young People

The policy supports young people who are 16/17 and have a need to access social housing. Young people can be supported by a guarantor to access the housing register. Whilst the housing service can work directly with our registered providers on a case-by-case basis, the remit of the policy does not extend to the independent policies of these organisations which may impede the offer of a home.

Aim: To help social tenants be more mobile in where they live and work.

The policy includes 3 reasonable preference criteria in Band B High Housing Need and 1 reasonable preference criteria in Band C Medium Housing Need that all relate to existing social tenants.

- Band B – Under Occupying Social Housing.
- Band B – Social tenant living in an adapted property.
- Band B – Social tenant requiring extensive adaptations.
- Band C – Social tenant with right to move for work.

Prioritising these households is intended to meet this aim. For example, installing new adaptations to homes is costly and can cause delays for households who need this type of home. Releasing homes already adapted to others in need is one way of making best use of housing stock.

Maximising opportunities for social housing tenants to seek and take up employment anywhere in the Dorset Council area is improved when barriers are removed and including this reasonable preference meets the related legislative requirements.

Under Occupying Social Housing

These applicants already live in social housing in the Dorset Council area and under-occupy their current home. They are looking to move to a smaller, more suitable property that matches their need.

The data illustrates:

Band B Under Occupying Social Housing	No.
Applications	175
Housed	25
Active	132

These 25 homes are re-let to households from the housing register according to priority.

Social tenant living in an adapted property.

These applicants already live in social housing and the property has adaptations however, the adaptations are no longer required. There have been no applications assessed as meeting this need.

Recommendation: Promote with social landlords.

Social tenant requiring extensive adaptations.

The applicants will already be living in social housing in the Dorset Council area but require extensive adaptations and is prepared to move to a property with the adaptations rather than have them done in their current home. Extensive adaptations may include stair lifts, through floor lift, level access shower or ramp.

The data illustrates:

Band B Social Tenant Requiring Extensive Adaptations	No.
Applications	5
Housed	1
Active	4

Aim: To meet all legal requirements and be flexible and responsive to change.

Amendments to the policy have already been made to meet the requirements of changes in relevant legislation. Amendments were approved by the Portfolio holder under delegated authority and are:

- Section 9 Eligibility

New item (e) 'People arriving the UK under the Ukrainian Family Scheme or Homes for Ukraine Scheme.'
- Section 14 Exceptions (to local connection)

New item (q) 'People fleeing Ukraine who are British nationals or other persons not subject to immigration control with a right of abode in the UK.'

These amendments follow the guidance to local authorities.

Aim: A scheme for local people that is fair, modern, and easy to use.

The policy includes all the statutory reasonable preferences required:

- People who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act (including those who are intentionally homeless and those not in priority need).
- People who are owed a duty by the local authority under section 190(2), 193(2), or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985 or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3).
- People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to disability.
- People who need to move to a particular location in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

Additionally, the policy excludes applicants for 12 months who would otherwise be eligible where there is evidence of deliberately worsening circumstances to access to the housing register or improve priority. The policy includes the applicants right to a review.

The policy implementation has been supported with a revised suite of letters, refreshed webpages, new processes, responsive configuration capabilities and digital technology. The

digital first approach is supported by officers who can support households who need to use other methods to participate in the scheme.

Aim: To offer advice and housing solutions to those in greatest need including the reduction and prevention of homelessness.

The policy provides advice and solutions to those in greatest need including homeless households by:

- meeting legislative requirements.
- exempting 17 vulnerable cohorts from meeting the general local connection criteria including homeless households.
- including high band reasonable preference where there is a corporate parenting responsibility to enable planned moves into suitable independent accommodation.
- including a high band reasonable preference where a corporate duty exists to prevent residential placements and placements outside of the Dorset Council area.
- including a high band reasonable preference for those living in supported accommodation who are ready to move into suitable independent accommodation.
- including a high band reasonable preference for service personnel.
- providing information about mitigating existing rent arrears with evidenced repayments.
- including exceptions from the financial resource limit for certain households.
- providing exceptions from property ownership restrictions for certain households.
- being available to prisoners within 2 months of their release date.
- supporting households to bid who need it.
- offering choice about where people live.
- including a mechanism for the council to make a direct offer of accommodation when reasonable bids are not made by the applicant.
- including a mechanism to automatically bid for households with a full statutory housing duty.
- discharging duty to a homeless household subject to S193(2) if a suitable offer of accommodation is refused.
- Providing examples or explanatory text for each reasonable preference.

Date: June 2023