

## Appendix 2 - Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy Review of Changes

The current housing allocation policy replaced two housing allocation policies used by the five legacy housing authorities. Some of the changes introduced harmonised the previous policies and offer one approach for the whole of the Dorset Council area. This section reviews these changes and considers what the impact is for households.

When reviewing the data, it is relevant to note that applicants can have more than one reasonable preference. The data includes applicants who are 'housed' which may have been because of a second higher reasonable preference. Successful lettings may be because bids placed by applicants or a low level of direct lets by the housing service. The number of 'active' applications may not correlate because applications can be closed in a variety of circumstances for example closed; suspended, housed etc.

The following section reviews changes that affect a range of bands.

### Homelessness

Previously reasonable preference criterion relating to homeless households were found in Band A and/or Band C or the equivalent depending on the legacy authority. This policy introduced at least one reasonable preference criterion in Band A, Band B and Band C.

Previously, policies included a mechanism to uplift a homeless households' banding assessment from Band C to Band A after a period if they remained homeless (except for the former East area). The time allowed ranged from 3 months to 12 months depending on the former area. The current policy removed this uplift.

The new policy also aims to limit the time any household spends in Band A before their housing need is remedied.

Levels of homeless approaches have risen by 17.25% in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22. Some homeless households do not make a housing register application but are supported by our homeless service. A total of 47% of all lettings have been to homeless households. Applications are closed or ineligible for various reasons.

The data illustrates:

*Band A - Statutory homeless and owed the full housing duty by Dorset Council S193(2).*

Band A Statutory Homeless and owed the full Housing Duty S193(2)	
Applications	801
Housed	442
Active	253

Band A Statutory Homeless and owed the full Housing Duty S193(2)	Number of lets
1 Bed	175
2 Bed	177
3 Bed	71
4 Bed	19

*Band B - Owed a relief duty S189B(2)*

Owed a relief duty under S189B(2)	
Applications	344
Housed	146
Active	114

Owed a relief duty under S189B(2)	Number of lets
1 Bed	68
2 Bed	65
3 Bed	12
4 Bed	1

*Band B - Owed a relief duty under S189B(2) with no local connection*

Owed a relief duty with no local connection under S189B(2)	
Applications	98
Housed	17
Active	49

Owed a relief duty with no local connection under S189B(2)	Number of lets
1 Bed	10
2 Bed	7
3 Bed	0

4 Bed	0
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*Band C - Owed a prevention duty under S195(2)*

Owed a prevention duty under S195(2)	
Applications	201
Housed	59
Active	49

Owed a prevention duty under S195(2)	Number of lets
1 Bed	20
2 Bed	35
3 Bed	3
4 Bed	1

*Band C - Homeless Households*

Homeless Households	
Applications	202
Housed	50
Active	130

Homeless Households	Number of lets
1 Bed	28
2 Bed	21
3 Bed	1
4 Bed	0

*Band C - Accommodation Duty following deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate S193C(4) duty owed*

Accommodation duty following deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate S193C(4) duty owed	
Applications	0
Housed	0
Active	0

*Band C - Owed a prevention duty under S195(2) with no local connection.*

Owed a prevention duty under S195(2) with no local connection	
Applications	50
Housed	8
Active	32

Owed a prevention duty under S195(2) with no local connection	Number of lets
1 Bed	5
2 Bed	3
3 Bed	0
4 Bed	0

The data illustrates most lettings have been into 1- or 2-bedroom properties and a good rate of successful lets are being made to homeless applicants.

**Local Connection**

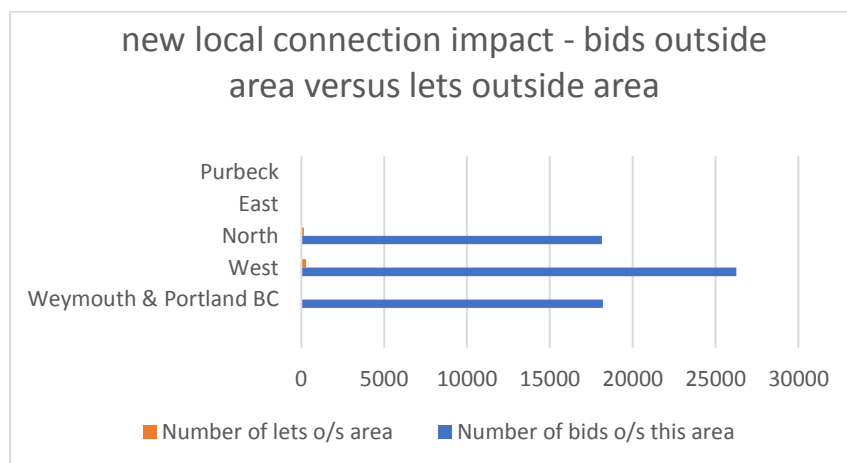
Applicants who are eligible and who qualify to join the housing register must also meet one of the local connection criteria unless they meet one of the exception criteria.

Local connection is underpinned by any specific connection criteria required by a local letting plan or social landlord relating to a specific property or development.

Previously, applicants needed to demonstrate either a residency, close family, or employment connection to the area boundary of the housing authority they lived in (with some exceptions). Currently, applicants need to demonstrate one of these connections to anywhere in the Dorset Council area to access the housing register.

Applicants can also place bids for suitable homes anywhere in the Dorset area. Where specific local connection requirements exist, applications are prioritised for those households who meet that requirement. A cascade mechanism is in place to widen the area where there are no or insufficient households in the immediate vicinity to fill the vacancies.

The data shows people are willing to move across our area to meet their housing need and have placed a good level of bids for homes that they would not have been able to bid for previously due to local connection. It also illustrates the number of successful lets made to households from outside the immediate area are low.



Previously, the residency local connection criteria required an applicant to evidence was different depending on where the applicant lived and ranged from 2 years to 5 years. Currently, this is 2 years or 3 years out of the last 5 years.

This change ensures households who have moved marginally over the Dorset Council boarder are able to access the housing register if they have a housing need that could be remedied by accessing social housing in our area.

### **Medical Needs and Welfare Needs**

Legacy policies included reasonable preference categories for medical and welfare housing needs together in different bands depending on the policy. This policy separated these housing needs and included a relevant criterion in Bands A, B and C to provide more transparency and offer suitable prioritisation depending on the severity of the housing need.

In Dorset approximately 1 in 5 of our residents have a limiting long-term illness that affects their daily lives either a little or a lot. In 2020 there were 56,700 residents claiming disability benefit. The data for medical reasonable preference illustrates:

Band	Applications	Housed	Active
Band A Urgent Housing Need	36	16	16
Band B High Housing Need	301	87	188
Band C Medium Housing Need	684	168	452
Band D Low Housing Need	280	45	209

The data suggests there is strong demand from our residents who have a medical related housing need that cannot be met in their current accommodation.

Overall, there has been 29,983 bids placed by applicants assessed with medical housing needs indicating the cohort are actively seeking new accommodation leading to 316 new lets. The ratio of bids to lets is low but helps support the development new homes for this cohort. It also indicates the highest proportion of lets compared to applications is for those households in the highest housing need.

The data for welfare reasonable preference illustrates:

Band	Applications	Housed	Active
Band A Urgent Housing Need	26	8	15
Band B High Housing Need	155	45	101
Band C Medium Housing Need	252	64	176
Band D Low Housing Need	40	10	28

Overall, there has been 12,786 bids

placed by this relatively small number of applicants assessed with welfare related housing needs and has led to 121 new lets. This indicates these households are actively seeking new accommodation but the ratio of bid to let is low.

### Keyworkers

The former East Dorset area policy included a reasonable preference for key workers and is not included in the current policy.

Keyworker status is not clearly defined other than an employee providing an essential service. During the engagement stage of developing the current policy, social landlords raised concerns about the management of voids in relation to properties designated for keyworkers. Concerns exist about tenancy security for tenants whose keyworker employment ends and there are examples of tenancies being lost in such circumstances.

There are other mechanisms available that could support the provision and access to affordable housing for keyworkers such as local lettings plan and can define specific keyworkers relevant to the local area or new development.

### **Deliberately Worsening Circumstances**

This policy removed this reasonable preference which was previously available for all legacy areas in Band D.

Where there is evidence, an applicant has worsened their circumstances to increase their prioritisation or access the housing register, the policy provides guidance at section 19 and is reviewed in appendix 3.

### **Foster Carers & Approved to Adopt**

Previous policies included a separate reasonable preference for households with this housing need because they are or in the process of being approved to adopt or become a foster carer. The current policy changed this and included this cohort under the Corporate Duty reasonable preference in Band B.

The data illustrates:

Band B Corporate Duty	Overall	Adopt/Foster
Applications	12	5
Housed	2	0
Active	10	5

Overall, there has been 270 bids placed leading to 2 new lets. Of these, 4 households who are adopters or foster carers have placed a total of 53 bids which led to no new lets although most of these have been very recently and in respect of a new development.

This indicates a low level of bidding leading to successful lets which means potential homes for vulnerable children are not available. Both Children's Services and the Housing Service are working jointly to support households to submit applications and to actively bid for suitable homes. Ensuring timely applications leading to the earliest effective date possible will improve the rate of successful lets and ensure placements into residential care or outside the Dorset Council area are minimised.

The following section reviews changes to reasonable preferences in single bands:

### **Band A – Urgent Housing Need**

#### **Urgent Disrepair Need**

The policy harmonised our approach to disrepair and includes a reasonable preference in each band. The former East Dorset area did not have a Band A reasonable preference for this reason.

Band A urgent disrepair is for households who live in a property that would normally possess an imminent risk of serious harm to the health or safety of the occupiers akin to section 40 of the Housing Act 2004 (or a similar level of health or safety risk). An example might be significant disrepair to the property's fixed electrical wiring, putting the occupants at demonstrable risk of electric shock.

The data illustrates:

Band A Urgent Housing Need (Disrepair)	Overall	East Area	
Applications	21	Applicants	1
Housed	9	Housed	1
Active	11	Active	0

Residents in the former East Dorset area have applied and been assessed as meeting the Urgent disrepair housing need criteria although numbers are low. It also illustrates that as a stand-alone reason for applying for social housing, urgent disrepair is low.

### **Statutory Overcrowding Part X Housing Act 1985**

Previously statutory overcrowding was not included in the highest band by any of the legacy policies. This policy changed that reflecting advice received.

The data tells illustrates:

Band A Statutory Overcrowding	
Applications	10
Housed	5
Active	4

This indicates the need to have a reasonable preference in the highest band and despite overcrowding reasonable preferences being available in both Band B and C, there have been households who demonstrated an urgent housing need related to statutory overcrowding.

Of those currently active and statutorily overcrowded the data illustrates:

Number of Applications living in 2 bed	3	Number with 3 bed need	1
Number of Applications living in 3 bed	1	Number with 4 bed need	2
Number of Applications living in 4 bed	0	Number with 5 bed need	1



## **Band B – High Housing Need**

### **Supported Housing and Ready to Move On**

Previously applicants from the former Weymouth and Portland area were offered a lower priority banding. This policy harmonised the provision and Band B. This reasonable preference is for those who reside in short-term supported housing projects that is usually available for up to 2 years.

The data illustrates:

Band B Supported Housing Ready to Move On	Overall	Former W&P Area
Applications	142	69
Housed	49	15
Active	82	49

There have been 4,976 bids leading to 49 new lets overall. Of these, 2,427 bids were from applicants living in the former Weymouth & Portland area. These bids led to 15 new lets. This information indicates approximately 48% of all bids are from applicants in the former Weymouth and Portland area and 30% of lets went to these applicants.

It is clear these applicants are actively seeking to move on to independent living having benefitted from the support in their current accommodation. The low ratio of lets to bids suggests households with higher priority or who meet any specific local connection requirement are being prioritised. It also indicates several households are occupying support housing who no longer need this level of support.

Recognising the effectiveness of the policy, using its flexibility is an option to prioritise a proportion of vacancies for this cohort that could have a positive impact on this cohort and make available this supported housing to others in need.

### **Service Personnel**

Previously this reasonable preference was in Band C and has now been uplifted to Band B in response to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Applicants are exempt from meeting the local connection criteria and will be assessed as meeting this reasonable preference if no other identified housing need exists and they have provided proof of their date of discharge.

Applicants are subject to the overall financial assessment although this excludes any lump sum payments received due as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service.

The data illustrates:

Band B Service Personnel	
Applications	45
Housed	8
Active	32

There were 695 bids placed by these applicants. 41 of these applicants were also assessed as homeless and placed into Band B. 1 of these applicants have been housed and 10 are active and are included in the above data.

### **Band C – Medium Housing Need**

#### **Affordability**

The policy includes a reasonable preference category in Band C related to affordability. Previously this category was not available to applicants from the former East Dorset Area. Applicants assessed as meeting this criterion will live in a property that has become unaffordable due to a change in circumstances and are likely to experience hardship or be at risk of homelessness. This assessment is supported by a financial assessment.

The data illustrates:

Band C Affordability	Overall	Former East
Applications	70	24
Housed	14	5
Active	54	19

The number of applicants from the former East area represent approximately 34% of all applications.

#### **Need to move for critical/essential support to avoid hardship.**

The policy includes this reasonable preference in Band C. Previously this was not available to applicants from the former Purbeck District or East Dorset areas. This relates to those households who need to move to a particular area to avoid hardship to themselves or others. Examples include:

- applicants need to receive care.
- the applicant needs to give critical care or support to someone within the council area.
- to access specialist medical treatment.
- victims of harassment or violence.

The data illustrates:

Band C Need to move for critical/essential support to avoid hardship	Overall	Former East Area	Former Purbeck Area
Applications	109	20	9
Housed	22	6	1
Active	73	13	8

The data indicates applicants from the former East and Purbeck areas have benefitted from this reasonable preference. There has been a total of 2,438 bids placed by applicants in this reasonable preference banding which shows they are actively seeking to move. However, of these only 22 have been successful.

Although the bid to let ratio is low applicants the policy provides applicants mechanisms to ask for a review, inform us of changes that might affect their assessment and to meet higher reasonable preference categories that are more suitable and would improve their likelihood of placing a successful bid.

## **Band D – Low Housing Need**

### **Low Housing Need**

Previously policies termed this reasonable preference as 'adequately housed'. The current policy changed the title of the reasonable preference to 'Low Housing Need' to make it easier to understand. The households will, at the time of their application, live in a property which is adequate for their needs in terms of size and facilities and not meet other banding criteria. For example, an adult non-dependent living with parents but who is not able to afford to move on and live independently. They will consider their current property does not meet their needs, but would otherwise, be excluded from registering.

Providing this option, recognises these needs and provides an opportunity for these households to bid for properties they are interested in. The type of property may be, developed by a community land trust, be independent affordable accommodation or are hard to let.

The former Weymouth & Portland, Purbeck and East areas did not include this reasonable preference.

The data illustrates:

Band D Low Housing Need	Overall	East	Purbeck	W & P
Applications	1298	323	207	268
Housed	154	40	27	17
Active	1053	267	171	235

These applicants are actively bidding to seek new accommodation and as a total placed 27,266 bids. The former Weymouth & Portland area is the least successful in terms of bid to let ratio.

The table below illustrates the type of accommodation these applicants currently have and indicates the top three are private rented accommodation; social housing; living with family:

Current Accommodation	Number
Not provided	64
provided by employer	9
armed forces	2
caravan/houseboat	7
council/housing association	305
homeless	22
homeowner	3
living with family	186
living with friends	17
lodger/house share	8
no fixed abode	21
other	39
refuge	4
private landlord	591
shared ownership	1
student accommodation	0
temporary accommodation	18
Young persons supported accommodation	1
	1298

Further analysis was done to examine those applicants who have stated they are homeless, living in temporary accommodation or of no fixed abode. These applicants have relevant homeless reasonable preferences awarded related to their homelessness and will be removed from the Band D low housing need category.

### **Low Disrepair Need**

This reasonable preference was available to applicants from all other areas except those from the former East area.

Households will have a home that has one or more category 2 hazards (F or below) (or similar level of health or safety risk) as defined under the Housing Act 2004, Housing Health and Safety Rating System as identified by the council's housing standards team. For example, a property that has mould growth due to condensation in a number of habitable rooms.

The data illustrates:

Band D Low Disrepair	Overall	East
Applications	5	0
Housed	2	0
Active	3	0

These applicants placed 238 bids leading to 2 new lettings. Although there is a low level of activity including this reasonable preference ensures households can apply and we know a small number of applicants have been successful in finding a new home. When households with the lowest band priority are successful this is usually due to a requirement to let within a specific parish or local area and ensures a measure of opportunity exists at a very local level.

Anecdotally, the housing standards across the area in the private rented sector do not vary to a high degree. The ratio of owner/occupiers is higher in the former East area, but further investigation would be required to gain any additional insight required.

### **Older People's Housing**

Previously, applications from the former East area did not have this option and were restricted to hard to let or sheltered housing. Older people's housing is often determined when the property is built and subject to age restrictions.

For applicants to meet this category they will need to meet any age restrictions, have a local connection to somewhere in the whole of the DC area and be otherwise assessed as reasonably housed. They will not be subject to the financial restrictions.

The data illustrates:

Band D Older People's Housing	Overall	East
Applications	692	169
Housed	118	36
Active	526	118

There has been a total of 11,451 bids by these applicants which illustrates they are actively seeking new accommodation. Although these applicants are exempt from the financial resource limit restrictions and may be homeowners only 30 of the above applicants are homeowners.

Data is used from the housing register when new sites are being developed. By positively influencing the inclusion of homes built for older people where we know there is demand could help meet these applicants housing needs and release occupied properties to the market.

### **Older People’s Housing No Local Connection**

Previously, applicants from the former East and Purbeck areas did not have this option. Bids from these applicants are considered after bids from households who do meet the local connection criteria and are restricted to these properties only.

The data illustrates:

Band D Older People's Housing - No Local Connection	Overall	East	Purbeck
Applications	293	100	40
Housed	47	23	9
Active	212	69	27

These applicants have placed 4,758 bids leading to 47 new lets. The number of applications and successful bids illustrates the demand leading to new lets. In addition to meeting this otherwise unmet housing need, social landlords can let property preventing property disposal, or the impact of costs linked to voids.

### **Supported Housing Not Ready to Move On**

Former East area applicants did not have this reasonable preference. These applicants are currently residing in accommodation under short term supported housing project but have not yet been assessed as ready to move on. As part of their programme to reach the ‘ready to move on’ stage, applicants will work with their support provider and preparing for the next step in their journey.

Submitting an early application to the housing register helps applicants to think about their choices, offers them an earlier effective date and provides data for projected need.

Applicants can place bids and a housing association may offer a home if they are satisfied by the level of independent living the applicant can demonstrate.

The data illustrates:

Band D Supported Housing Not Ready to Move On	Overall	East
Applications	31	3
Housed	5	0
Active	22	3

Applications are being made as part of the work with these applicants including those from the former East are which is positive. Support providers are encouraged to update the housing service when applicants meet the requirements to live independently and at this time their assessment will be amended to Band B 'Supported Housing Ready to Move On'. Applicants can bid in advance and where they are shortlisted, social landlords may decide to offer a property at this earlier stage and the data illustrates 5 applicants we have achieved this positive outcome.

There have been recent increases in supported accommodation options in the East area. Future monitoring will illustrate how early occupants choose to apply to the housing register.

### **Other Housing Related Debts**

Applicants from the former East area did not have this reasonable preference. The policy excludes eligible applicants who have rent arrears of 8 weeks or more when they cannot evidence repayment attempts. This reasonable preference applies to applicants who have current or former rent arrears (including those who evidence a payment arrangement or similar attempt), but also includes other housing related debts. A full list can be found in Appendix 3.

Applicants can place bids; however, they may be refused by a social landlord whilst any housing related debt exists according to their own policy and is outside the control of the housing allocation policy.

The data illustrates:

Band D Other Housing Related Debts	Overall	East
Applications	2	0
Housed	1	0
Active	0	0

There were 119 bids leading to 1 new let however, this was due to the Band B Homeless Relief duty the applicant had also been assessed as meeting.

The review anticipated a higher number of applicants awarded this reasonable preference and recommends a dedicated task is carried out to further examine households with housing related debt.

Date: June 2023