

People and Health Overview Committee

2 February 2026

Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy 2026 - 2031

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Cabinet Member:

Cllr G Taylor, Health and Housing

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Price, Executive Director of People - Adults

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Statutory Authority: Housing Act 1996, part 6

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

1. Dorset Council's Housing Allocation Policy sets out how social and affordable housing is allocated across the Dorset Council area. The current allocation policy (2020-2026) is due for renewal, and a comprehensive review has been undertaken to ensure the policy remains fit for purpose and aligned with legislative requirements, local housing need, and strategic priorities.
 - 1.1 Following a detailed review and a 12-week public consultation. The consultation closed on 24 August 2025, and the feedback received has informed the final proposed version of the policy. In addition to the consultation, engagement took place with:
 - Housing Services
 - Elected Members
 - Registered Providers
 - Homelessness Forum members
 - Internal stakeholders (Adults and Children's Services)

- 1.2 The revised policy aims to ensure fair and transparent access to housing, make best use of available social housing stock, and support Dorset Council's wider objectives around homelessness prevention, community sustainability, and effective management of housing demand.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

That the People and Health Overview Committee:

- a) Endorses the proposed changes set out in the report and the draft policy (Appendix 1)
- b) Notes the outcome of the public consultation on the draft Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy 2026 – 2031
- c) Recommends to Cabinet that the Housing Allocation Policy 2026 – 2031 be approved and adopted by Full Council

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 To ensure Dorset Council has a clear, fair, and legally compliant policy governing the allocation of social housing, consistent with the Council's statutory duties under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 considering the needs and priorities of Dorset residents.

4. **The report**

- 4.1 The current Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy (2020-2026) was adopted following Local Government Reorganisation to create a single, consistent approach to managing housing allocations across the Dorset Council area.

Since its adoption, several factors have prompted the need for review, including:

- Continued pressure for social and affordable rented housing, with increasing numbers on the Housing Register and sustained enquiries from households following an effective early homeless prevention information and advice campaign as well as the continued cost of living crisis.
- The changing needs of Dorset Council residents
- A need to improve clarity, accessibility, and administrative efficiency.

- Updates to Government guidance and case law, decisions and advice relating to the local government and social care ombudsman relating to allocation schemes.

4.2 Dorset Council has benefitted from the support and advice of an external expert, Neil Morland, to review and revise the Dorset Council Housing Allocations Policy, the Nomination Agreement with the Registered Providers and the Data Sharing Protocol.

4.3 The revised policy (2026 -2031) maintains the core principles of the existing scheme but includes several updates following the review and consultation. Key proposed changes include:

- Simplification of banding framework – the existing banding structure has been simplified by reducing the number of bands and revised band names. Each band now contains clearer categories making the policy easier to understand, ensuring greater alignment between housing need and priority awarded.
- Consistent local connection requirements – a standard two-year local connection requirement has been applied across all relevant criteria, including residence, employment, and family connection. This provides a consistent and transparent approach to assessing qualification.
- Revised savings and earnings thresholds – the policy replaces the previous combined income, savings and capital threshold of £60,000 gross: with separate limits of savings up to £16,000 and earnings up to £60,000 gross.
- Removal of age-based banding without local connection – this policy no longer proposes allowing applicants aged 55 and over to qualify without a local connection to Dorset Council.
- Assessment of overcrowding – the policy proposes using the bedroom standard, rather than the local housing allowance standard, when assessing overcrowding. This aligns the policy with a widely recognised and consistent measure of housing need.
- Qualification requirements for households owed a homelessness duty – the policy proposes that those applicants owed a homeless duty must meet the qualification criteria in the same way as anyone else applying to the housing register.
- Removal of housing related-debt – the banding has been removed as a qualification or prioritisation consideration within the policy, simplifying assessments and supporting access to the housing register.
- Additional reasonable preference given to Service personnel in urgent housing need.
- Recognition of the Armed Forces community – a new banding category has been introduced for members of the Armed Forces community, including spouses and adult children of serving or former personnel.

- Use of quotas – the policy introduces the ability to use quotas to manage allocation across different categories of housing need.
- 4.4 The final policy ensures compliance with statutory requirements and equalities considerations.

6 Alternative options considered

- 5.1 As part of the policy review, consideration was given to replacing the current Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) approach with a point-based system, which remain permissible under the Housing Act 1996. This option was not progressed for several reasons. Point-based systems are generally more complex and less transparent for applicants, who often find it difficult to understand how their points translate into the likelihood of being rehoused. In contrast, CBL provides clearer expectations by enabling applicants to view available properties and their bidding position. Furthermore, implementing a point-based system would require significant redesign of IT systems, allocation workflows, and communication processes. Retaining CBL therefore maximises the use of existing digital infrastructure and avoids unnecessary disruption.
- 5.2 The review also examined whether changes should be made to the qualifying and disqualifying criteria. Following detailed consideration, it was agreed that the existing criteria should be retained to ensure consistency and fairness. However, the draft policy has been amended to provide greater clarity on specific aspects, including definitions of local connection, income thresholds, and circumstances where disqualification applies. These refinements are intended to improve transparency, support consistent decision-making, and enhance confidence in the allocations process.

6 Legal considerations

- 6.1 The policy ensures compliance with the Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002 (as amended), Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and relevant statutory guidance on social housing allocations.
- 6.2 Legal services have reviewed the draft policy to confirm its compliance and robustness.

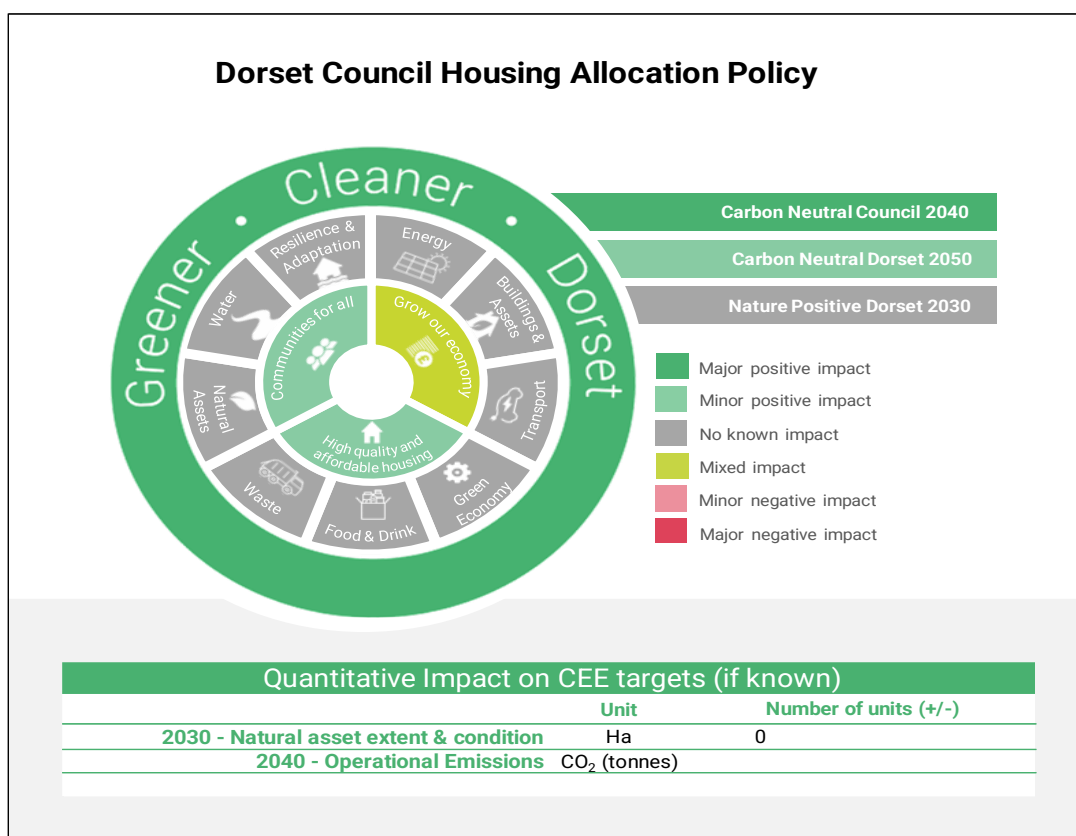
7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The proposal includes the creation of temporary posts for a fixed period of one year. These posts will provide additional capacity within the service to

enable the reassessment of current applications while maintaining business-as-usual operations. Funding for these temporary posts will require an agreed one-off allocation of corporate resources, and a business case has been submitted for consideration as part of the budget-setting process.

There are no direct financial implications associated with changes to the Huume Housing system, as the system allows for most adjustments to be made internally without additional cost. Any minor configuration changes will be managed within existing resources.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 Revising the Housing Allocation Policy is expected to have a direct impact on the well-being and health of residents who rely on the service. A clearer, fairer and more responsive policy can support better housing outcomes, which are closely linked to mental health. Households with medical needs, disabilities, or vulnerabilities may benefit from clearer criteria and banding enabling them to access appropriate accommodation.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 The allocations policy underpins the Council's wider strategic objectives. It supports the prevention of homelessness in line with the Homelessness Strategy and aligns with the Housing Strategy. The policy also reflects the Council's strategic approach to social housing tenure and will complement the forthcoming Tenancy Strategy once approved. In addition, it forms a key component of the Housing Strategy by making best use of new and existing housing stock to meet identified needs.

11. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: High

- **Insufficient Resources:** Failure to secure temporary staffing and an implementation period to reassess over 6,000 applications risks delays and service disruption, directly impacting the Council's strategic priority to deliver fair and timely housing allocations.

Mitigation - A business case has been submitted for temporary staffing to provide additional capacity during implementation. This will ensure reassessment of the housing register and delivery of business as usual services. Recruitment will be prioritised and monitored to avoid delays.

- **System Configuration:** Inadequate time for updating the housing software to reflect new processes could lead to operational errors, undermining the strategic priority of maintaining efficient, compliant, and customer-focused services.

Mitigation - Early engagement with the IT provider (Huume) has confirmed that required changes can be implemented internally. A configuration plan is being scheduled alongside staff training to ensure the system reflects the new policy before go-live. Contingency time has been built into the implementation timeline.

- **Policy Expiry and Legal Compliance:** If the revised policy is not adopted before the current one expires, allocations may be legally challenged and deemed invalid, jeopardising the Council's strategic priority to comply with statutory guidance and meet current housing needs in Dorset.

Mitigation - the revised policy is scheduled for adoption before the current policy expires to maintain legal compliance. A clear timeline for approval and implementation has been agreed. Minor amendments will continue to be made as required to reflect legislative changes.

Residual Risk: Low

While mitigation measures significantly reduce the likelihood of major issues, some residual risk remains. Recruitment delays or unexpected workload could still affect implementation timelines, and there is a risk that additional funding for temporary staff may not be approved, limiting capacity to deliver the changes. In addition, technical challenges may arise during system configuration. However, these risks are considered low and will be monitored throughout implementation.

12. Equalities

- 12.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed, and the assessment and action plan are attached at Appendix 3.
- 12.2 A statutory public consultation was conducted between 2 June 2025 and 24 August 2025, receiving 713 responses. Feedback included contributions from individuals with protected characteristics such as age, disability, gender reassignment, sex, and race, as well as respondents from the armed forces community and those living in rural areas.
- 12.3 Analysis of the consultation and engagement feedback informed the policy revisions. The updated policy strengthens support for vulnerable individuals, ensures equitable access, and enables all applicants to fully engage with the scheme. Overall, respondents expressed strong agreement with the proposed changes, particularly those relating to local connection, employment criteria, and the simplification of the banding. Some proposals, such as the timeframe for certain processes, received mixed views; however, most responses remained broadly supportive. These findings confirm that the revised policy reflects public priorities while maintaining fairness and transparency.
- 12.4 The Housing Service also sought advice from the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Panel (EDI) who broadly supported the proposed changes but highlighted areas requiring clarity and inclusivity. These points have informed clarifications in the policy and will be monitored to ensure fairness and accessibility.

13. Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix 1 - Draft Dorset Council Housing Allocation Policy
- Appendix 2 - Consultation response
- Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

14. Background papers

- [Housing Act 1996, Part six UK parliament](#)
- [Allocations of accommodation statutory guidance, Ministry of housing, communities and local government](#)
- [Providing social housing for local people \(statutory guidance\)](#)
- [Right to move and social housing allocations \(statutory guidance\)](#)
- [Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse \(statutory guidance\)](#)
- [Improving access to social housing for members of the armed forces \(statutory guidance\)](#)
- [Tenancy Standard, regulator of social housing](#)
- [Housing and Disabled people, a toolkit for local authorities in England: allocations, equality and human rights commission](#)
- [Housing allocations for disabled people, local government ombudsman](#)
- [Domestic abuse and housing decisions, local government ombudsman](#)
- [Medical assessments for housing applications, local government ombudsman](#)

15 Report sign-off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)