

Chichester District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Review of the Housing Register and Allocation Scheme

1. Contacts

Report Author

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2. Recommendation

The Committee is invited to consider a range of issues in relation to the Housing Register and Allocation Scheme and consider how members might be involved in the forthcoming review of the Council's policy in this area.

3. Background

- 4.1 The Council administers a *Housing Register* which is used as the basis for the allocation of social housing in the District. Key elements of the Housing Register, including the definition of groups to whom '*reasonable preference*' in the allocation of housing must be given, are prescribed by law. But within this framework, Councils have a considerable degree of latitude to frame policies which meet local priorities.
- 4.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee last considered the Housing Allocation Scheme in June 2017. Since then, the Council has adopted a new five year Housing Strategy which contains a commitment to undertake a review of the policy. This is expected to involve changes in a number of areas which are briefly described in paragraph 6.2.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 5.1 At this point, no detailed proposals are put forward. Instead, the report sets out a number of broad areas which the Committee may wish to consider. This is intended to provide the Committee with an early oversight of the issues involved and an opportunity to provide a steer on the emerging proposals.
- 5.2 It is envisaged that more detailed consideration of such issues might most usefully take place within a smaller working group with a brief to agree proposals for change in a number of areas which would in turn become the subject of consultation with Registered Providers and Stakeholders.
- 5.3 The intended outcome is that OSC is able to contribute to the development of the Council's policy in this area and the formulation of a revised housing allocation scheme which will subsequently be the subject of a Cabinet decision.

5. Proposal

- 6.1 The scope for the review is potentially very broad but there are some specific issues which can be highlighted here which require detailed consideration. A number of these issues are listed below, although members may feel that there are additional issues which need to be added.
- 6.2 Issues for Consideration:
1. **Managing Homelessness and the Use of Temporary Accommodation:** this is a key element of the Council's Covid 19 Recovery Plan. The Housing Allocation scheme needs to balance the Council's obligations to homeless households and those in temporary accommodation with other households in housing need. Some authorities achieve this by defining targets for allocations to different categories of applicant, with options to flex these criteria in order to manage the overall numbers of households who are placed in temporary accommodation.
 2. **Rehousing for Residents of Supported Housing:** there are some specific issues concerned with providing opportunities for residents of Supported Housing schemes to move into more permanent social housing properties. This includes a range of groups including former rough sleepers, women in refuges and Care Leavers amongst others. The value of supported housing schemes can be enhanced by the ability of residents to 'move on'. Clearly the Allocation Scheme has the potential to do this which should be further explored.
 3. **Eligibility for the Housing Register:** at present income and savings thresholds are applied to determine eligibility for the Housing Register however in view of rising housing costs these need to be reviewed.
 4. **Local Connection rules:** The District is a very attractive place to live and the Council introduced a raft of rules relating to local connection in 2012 which restricted eligibility. At the same time local connection rules apply to the process of prioritisation of applicants for some types of property. It would be useful to review the impact of these rules and make changes if necessary. One aspect of this to which we are required to give specific attention is the treatment of former service personnel and their families.
 5. **Low Demand and Refusals:** Notwithstanding the very high level of need for affordable housing in the District some types of property attract low levels of interest and are frequently refused. It would be useful to examine this further with a view to longer term decisions regarding both allocations and investment in the social housing stock by Registered Providers.
 6. **The Bidding Process:** Currently properties are advertised to applicants and bids invited through a fortnightly cycle. Currently the portal for this provided by an external provider, Locata. In September the contract for this service will end and transfer to a new provider, Home Connections. It may be useful for members to acquaint themselves with the bidding and advertising process and consider whether options for improvement including perhaps a transition to weekly or even continuous bidding cycles.
- 6.3 Since the number of vacancies in the social housing sector is finite, making changes to the Housing Allocation policy involves a 'Zero Sum game'. Thus it is important to understand the implications for groups who may lose out as well as any unintended consequences of changes being made. This will require a detailed Impact Assessment Appraisal.

6.4 The aim would be to complete the review of the Housing Register during the autumn prior to a Cabinet Member decision and implementation of changes in early 2021. OSC's input to this process might best be achieved by the establishment of a small Task and Finish Group to review the current scheme and make recommendations for changes. Potentially this could be achieved with two TFG meetings bringing back recommendations to a future OSC meeting.

6. Resource and Legal Implications

8.1 There are no specific resource or legal implications arising from this report.

7. Consultation

9.1 It will be necessary to consult widely with affected partners and stakeholders regarding proposals which emerge from this process. This will include:

- a) Registered Providers
- b) Statutory partners such as WSCC Adults and Children's Services
- c) Voluntary sector agencies working with specifically affected groups; e.g. Stonepillow, Safe in Sussex.

8. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

Emerging proposals will be subject to an Impact Assessment Appraisal in due course as referred as indicated at 6.3.

9. Other Implications

	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder		x
Climate Change and Biodiversity		x
Human Rights and Equality Impact – The Housing Allocation scheme has important impacts in this area and the need for a robust Impact Appraisal is acknowledged.	x	
Safeguarding and Early Help		x
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)		x
Health and Wellbeing There is a close correlation between public health and housing and housing policies and practice impact directly on health outcomes for many of the most vulnerable people in our community	x	
Other (please specify)		

10. Background Papers

10.1 The current Housing Allocation Policy can be viewed at <https://www.chichester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=25981&p=0>