

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Paul Myers, Cabinet Member for Economic & Community Regeneration	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 26th January 2019	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3107
TITLE:	Homeseach Allocation Scheme Update	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Homeseach Allocation Scheme 2019		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The way social housing is allocated is an important part of creating communities where people choose to live and are able to prosper. The Homeseach Allocation Scheme details who is eligible for social housing and how we decide who should be housed first.
- 1.2 The current scheme was approved May 2016 and we are now proposing a number of amendments and technical changes to bring it in line with recent statutory changes and to improve implementation in partnership with registered housing providers¹.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member for Economic & Community Regeneration to formally adopt the amended Allocation Scheme, attached in Appendix 1.

¹ Also known as Housing Associations
Printed on recycled paper

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 The proposed scheme changes are not anticipated to impact upon resource requirements and are therefore to be managed within existing budgets.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Local Housing Authorities (LHA) are required by Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 to have an allocation scheme for determining priorities, and for defining the procedures to be followed in allocating housing accommodation; and they must allocate in accordance with that scheme. All aspects of the allocation process must be covered in the scheme, including the people by whom decisions are taken.
- 4.2 All LHAs must have an allocation scheme, regardless of whether they own housing stock. When framing or modifying their scheme, authorities must have regard to their current tenancy and homelessness strategies.
- 4.3 The Bath and North East Somerset Council Tenancy Strategy and Homelessness Strategy set out guidance to registered housing providers about tenancy types and permitted flexibilities and about the prevention of homelessness and supply of emergency and supported housing. The proposed modifications can be implemented without any impact on these strategies.
- 4.4 Local Authorities are subject to the general and specific duties set out in the Equality Act 2010. The equalities impact assessment relating to the previous scheme has been reviewed and no significant adverse impacts were identified. Furthermore the core objective of this scheme is to ensure that households who are unable to compete on the open market are provided with suitable and appropriate housing. As such the scheme supports the Council's wider public sector equality duty.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The Bath and North East Somerset Council Allocation Scheme, called Homesearch, was adopted in 2006 and modified in 2012 and 2016. The scheme operates in partnership with 22 RPs who manage around 95% of all the social housing stock in the district. Depending upon the landlord between 75% and 100% of their properties are allocated through the Homesearch scheme. Around 650-750 properties are successfully allocated through the scheme every year.
- 5.2 When a property becomes vacant it is advertised and households can express an interest in any property which meets their needs. The household in the highest of three groups is then nominated to that property. If two households in the same group express an interest then the household who has been in that Group for the longest time period secures the property. The system is relatively simple and transparency is enhanced by publishing the group and time on list details of the successful applicant. There are some specific conditions relating to local rural connection which applies to social housing properties in villages of less than 3,000 residents. In these cases households who can demonstrate a local connection to the village are prioritised above other applicants.

5.3 The proposed modifications to the scheme, detailed below, are required due to regulatory changes and to make administrative improvements as agreed with RPs.

Page	Change	Reason
9.	Clarification of what level of “support” is needed to secure local connection.	To make it clearer for applicants who are seeking to move into the area to support a family member.
9.	Changes to “Special Circumstance” element of local connection.	To meet updated Government guidance (December 2018) requiring LHAs to provide additional help to applicants who are in domestic abuse refuges in the district.
13.	Option to reduce priority/suspend Homesearch applications for applicants who have Homefinders debts <u>and</u> are refusing to engage in a repayment plan.	Homesearch Applicants who are not addressing debt are skipped for properties by social landlords. This change aims to incentivise early action by applicants to address debt and be ready for a new tenancy. It also supports repayment of Homefinder debts to the Council.
18.	Maximum bedroom size, policy to be clarified for families with 3+ children.	To make the policy clearer through a new “bedroom need” table.
25.	Changes to Welfare and Hardship Panel, to consider the lasting effect of domestic abuse on refuge applicants from other areas.	To meet updated Government guidance (December 2018) requiring LHAs to consider such information.
28.	Award Band B priority or additional “waiting time on list” when applicant eligible for either prevention or relief duty.	Required as a result of new duties placed on the Council by the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
43.	Ability to make direct offers to applicants at prevention, relief or full duty stages.	The Homelessness Reduction Act can require the LHA to keep applicants in temporary accommodation for longer than in the past. In limited circumstances we will directly match applicants with properties to reduce time spent in temporary accommodation.
n/a	Removal of all references to SMS text and phone bidding.	Both systems of expressing an interest are no longer operational.
n/a	Other minor changes, such as: table of	To reflect current circumstances

authorities; list of partners/registered providers; references to universal credit etc.	
---	--

6 RATIONALE

6.1 The Council is required to adopt and publish a housing allocations policy which articulates how social housing is allocated. This amendments will ensure that housing allocations continue to create balanced communities where people choose to live, make the best use of the housing stock, prioritise those in greatest need and adopt new flexibilities in line with changes to housing regulations.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 None

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

8.2 Our partner housing association's marketing and allocations teams and local residents have been consulted on the proposed changes. No objections have been raised to the amendments.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

Contact person	Graham Sabourn, Head of Housing (01225 477949).
Background papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	