

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Update on the Housing Allocations Policy - 12 Months post implementation</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	2nd December 2014

**Purpose of Report:** To update members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission on the Housing Allocations Policy 12 months post implementation and raise awareness of proposed future amendments.

**Recommended Action:** It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission notes the contents of the this report and conducts scrutiny accordingly.

**Key background documentation:** Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England, CLG, June 2012  
Statutory guidance 'Providing Social housing for local people' (CLG, \Dec 2013)

<b>Portfolio Member Details</b>	
<b>Name &amp; Telephone No.:</b>	Councillor Roger Croft - Tel 07765 224249
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	rcroft@westberks.gov.uk
<b>Contact Officer Details</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Cathy Dodson
<b>Job Title:</b>	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader
<b>Tel. No.:</b>	01635 519515
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	Cdodson@westberks.gov.uk

# Executive Report

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following a request by the Executive, at its meeting of 10 January 2012, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) agreed to assist in the development of a new policy for the allocation of social housing. The OSMC task group met four times to assist in developing the Housing Allocations Policy. West Berkshire Council's current Housing Allocation Policy (HAP) was adopted in October 2013.
- 1.2 In accordance with section 167 Housing Act 1996, the scheme determines the Council's priorities and procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation, framed to ensure that reasonable preference is given to a number of defined categories. The scheme was developed with regard to statutory guidance, including the 'Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England', published in June 2012
- 1.3 In December 2013, the Government published new statutory guidance. 'Providing Social Housing for Local People' (CLG, Dec 2013). In consequence, a review of the HAP has been undertaken and a number of amendments have been proposed to ensure that it reflects the requirements of the new statutory guidance.

## 2. Update on the Housing Allocation Policy – 12 months Post-Implementation

- 2.1. In October 2013, as part of the implementation to the new HAP, all existing Common Housing Register (CHR) applicants were required to complete an online re-registration form.
- 2.2 Applicants were required to complete the re-registration process so that administration staff could re-assess their applications in line with the new policy. The new application form required significantly more information than was previously gathered.
- 2.3 Any applicants identified to be vulnerable were offered either a face-to-face appointment or telephone support in completing the re-registration process. As expected not all applicants completed the re-registration process and the number of live applicants on the housing register decreased.
- 2.4 All applicants on CHR who completed the re-registration process were provided with an online personalised housing options action plan which summarised the available options based on the responses provided in the application. This continues to be an ongoing feature and one which has generated positive response from both service users and partner organisations.
- 2.5 All applicants who completed the re-registration process were sent a letter confirming their status on the CHR and their allocated number of housing need points. This letter advised applicants of their Right to Request a Review if they were dissatisfied with the outcome. We received 20 requests during the 12 months post-implementation period.
- 2.6 Prior to the implementation of the HAP extensive testing had been undertaken to confirm that those in the most housing need would still be in line for an allocation. In

practice we remain satisfied that the HAP continues to support applicants who are vulnerable and considered to be in the greatest housing need.

2.7 As of the 18th November 2014 the following data applies to the Common Housing Register.

Live Applications (Not all in Housing Need)	2602
Qualifying Applications	1074
Non Qualifying Applications	1528
One Bed Need	1342
Two Bed Need	880
Three Bed Need	292
Four + Bed Need	88

### 3. Proposed Amendments to the Allocations Policy

- 3.1 In December 2013, the Government published new statutory guidance, 'Providing Social Housing for Local People' (CLG, Dec 2013). In consequence, a review of the HAP has been undertaken and a number of amendments are proposed to ensure that it reflects the requirements of the new statutory guidance.
- 3.2 In addition to the proposed amendments to reflect the Statutory Guidance, some minor amendments have been proposed to offer clarification on the Housing Allocations Policy, remove inconsistencies and to reflect current operational practices and use of terminology (see Appendix A).
- 3.3 The proposals were presented to Corporate Board for consideration on the 11th November 2014 and are scheduled for consideration by Executive on 18th December 2014.

### 4. Proposals

- 4.1 The key changes to the proposed policy compared to the current policy are as follows:
- (a) Qualification - amend local connection qualifying criteria to residency or meaningful paid employment of at least 16 hours a week for 2 consecutive years. (Other aspects of local connection criteria remain the same)
  - (b) Social tenants and labour mobility – to allow for exceptions to local connection qualifying criteria to be applied to certain social tenants who need to move in order to sustain or take up employment
  - (c) Foster carers – inclusion in the policy to award an additional bedroom for approved foster carers.
  - (d) Homeless Households – new wording inserted to allow deferral of a CHR application for a minimum period of 4 months when a household is placed into temporary accommodation following acceptance of a full homelessness duty.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 An eight week public consultation was undertaken during September/October 2014. During this period views and comments were sought on the proposed amendments.
- 5.2 The consultation was successful in generating a high level of interest and participation. The majority of feedback from consultees was positive, welcoming provisions to implement amendments to the qualification criteria, social and labour mobility and the inclusion of an additional bedroom for foster carers (see Appendix B).

## **6. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes**

- 6.1 A Stage 2 Equalities Impact Assessment was completed when the allocations policy was adopted in October 2013. The proposed amendments to the allocations policy have not affected the outcome of the assessment.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 The Housing Allocations Policy has now been in place for 12 months. As part of this process a full review of the register was undertaken. The implementation of the HAP went smoothly and has been well received by the majority of applicants and has been effective at allocating social housing to those households considered to be in the most housing need.
- 7.2 The deferral process within the HAP has been used in accordance with the policy and has effectively prompted some applicants to address their former rent arrears and other monies owed to the Council.
- 7.3 The Housing Service intends to recommend that Executive approve and adopt the proposed amendments to Housing Allocations Policy, as detailed in this report.

## **8. Recommendation**

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission notes the contents of the report and conducts scrutiny accordingly.

## **Appendices**

---

Appendix A - Final draft Housing Allocations Policy

Appendix B - Verbatim Consultation Responses

Appendix C - Summary of amendments to Housing Allocations Policy following consultation and consideration by OSMC