

Title of Report:	Change to the Bedroom Allocation in the Council's Adopted Housing Allocation Policy
Report to be considered by:	Executive
Date of Meeting:	15 December 2011
Forward Plan Ref:	EX2384

Purpose of Report:

To recommend that the Council's Allocation Policy in respect of bedroom allocations is amended to bring social housing and private rented housing into line, reflecting the proposed changes in Local Housing Allowance and to ensure equity across housing tenures.

Recommended Action:

That Executive approve the amendment of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy to bring the bedroom allocation for social housing into line with the LHA regulations of the private rented sector, as set out in this report.

Reason for decision to be taken:

From April 2013 it is intended to introduce size criteria for new and existing working-age Housing Benefit claimants living in the social rented sector. The Council is currently assisting housing applicants into social rented accommodation that will be impacted by this change and therefore into accommodation that will potentially be unaffordable in the future. By taking the decision to amend the allocation policy now, the Council can reduce the number of social housing tenants who will be impacted by this future benefit change.

Other options considered:

The Council could wait until the benefit change is implemented: however, this will result in a higher number of social housing tenants being impacted by the changes.

Key background documentation:

n/a

<p>The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Plan Priority:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPP1 – Support our communities through the economic downturn – to alleviate the impact on different communities and individuals who find themselves out of work and/or disadvantaged</p> <p>The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Themes:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT3 - Affordable Housing</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT11 - Protecting Vulnerable People</p>
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The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by:
 making best use of scarce social rented housing units and reducing the impact of future benefit changes for people on low incomes.

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Alan Law - Tel (01491) 873614
E-mail Address:	alaw@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	17 October 2011

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Mel Brain
Job Title:	Housing Strategy & Operations Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 519403
E-mail Address:	mbrain@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

- Policy:** The proposal would form part of the Council's adopted Allocations Policy
- Financial:** The proposed amendment will require the Locata software system to be updated. This will cost approximately £1200 + VAT, which could be accommodated from existing budgets.
- Personnel:** N/A
- Legal/Procurement:** N/A
- Property:** N/A
- Risk Management:** The proposed amendment will reduce the number of social tenants affected by the future benefit change. In turn, this will reduce the number of social tenants whose accommodation may become unaffordable, thus reducing the number who may approach the Council's Housing Service for housing advice.
- Equalities Impact Assessment:** The proposed amendments do not change entitlement to social housing and housing will continue to be allocated on the basis of housing need. The proposed amendment will bring the size of social accommodation that applicants are entitled to into line with the national LHA Regulations.

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's Allocations Policy was adopted in 2007. The policy sets out the rules for the allocation of social rented housing, owned by partner Registered Providers, in the West Berkshire district.
- 1.2 The Allocation Policy includes rules on the size of property that households can expect to be allocated. The current policy is more generous than the Local Housing Allowance regulations allow for in the private rented sector. Consequently, many of the households that the Housing Service works with will not consider private rented accommodation as a housing option.
- 1.3 From April 2013 it is intended to introduce size criteria for new and existing working-age Housing Benefit claimants living in the social rented sector. The size criteria will replicate the size criteria that apply to Housing Benefit claimants in the private rented sector and whose claims are assessed using the local housing allowance rules. The applicable maximum rent will be reduced by a national percentage rate depending on how many bedrooms the household is considered not to require.
- 1.4 The Government have estimated that 26% of tenants of working age are likely to be affected by this change in the South East, with an average loss of housing benefit of £15 per week. They have also highlighted that there is potential for the measure to have a greater impact in rural areas and areas with lower concentrations of social rented housing.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 Given the high level of demand on the Housing Service at the current time, and having regard to the proposed future benefit changes, it is considered appropriate to implement a change to the Allocation Policy to bring the bedroom allocation for social tenancies into line with the private rented sector. This will result in equity across the tenures and should reduce the number of social housing tenants who will be impacted by the benefit change

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 It is recommended that Executive approve the amendment of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy to bring the bedroom allocation for social housing into line with the LHA regulations of the private rented sector.

Executive Report

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- 1.5 Given the high level of demand on the Housing Service at the current time, and having regard to the proposed future benefit changes, it is considered appropriate to implement a change to the Allocation Policy to bring the bedroom allocation for social tenancies into line with the private rented sector. This will result in equity across the tenures and should reduce the number of social housing tenants who will be impacted by the benefit change.

2. Proposed Amendment

- 2.1 The current bedroom allocation policy is as follows

Household size	Size and type of accommodation
1 person	Bedsit/1bedroomflat/maisonette/bungalow/house
2 people*	1 or 2 bedroom flat, maisonette, bungalow or house
3 people*	2 or 3 bedroom flat, maisonette, bungalow or house
4 people*	2 or 3 bedroom flat, maisonette, bungalow or house
5 people*	3 bedroom flat, maisonette, bungalow or house
6 people*	3 or 4 bedroom flat, maisonette, bungalow or house

* depends on the make-up of the applicants household.

2.2 The proposed policy is as follows:

“You are entitled to one bedroom for

- ~ every adult couple (married or unmarried)*
- ~ any other adult aged 16 or over*
- ~ any two children of the same sex aged 16 or under*
- ~ any two children aged under 10*
- ~ any other child*

Applicants who have shared responsibility for children will only have them considered as part of their household if it is determined that the children reside with them for at least 50 per cent of the week or more. Each case will be assessed on its own merits and determined alongside current legislation and case law.

For households that include a pregnant woman, the calculation will not make allowance for the baby until it is born and the birth certificate has been provided”.

2.3 From April 2011 there will be a new provision that permits an extra bedroom to be included in the Housing Benefit assessment for tenants in the private rented sector who have care provided by someone who lives elsewhere. This will apply where a customer or their partner has a recognised need for overnight care and has a bedroom that is used by a carer, or carers, for overnight stays as part of caring for the customer or partner. It is proposed that the Allocation Policy makes provision for an extra bedroom to be awarded in exceptional circumstances, in line with this policy, and only after discussion with the Benefits Service. All such exceptions should be signed off by a Social Care Commissioning & Housing Service Manager.

2.4 If agreed, the proposed policy will be implemented as soon as the Locata system changes can be made. All live applicants will have their bedroom allocation reviewed as part of this process.

3. Recommendation

3.1 That Executive approve the amendment of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy to bring the bedroom allocation for social housing into line with the LHA regulations of the private rented sector as set out in this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment – Stage 1

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: Partner RSLs

Officers Consulted: Elizabeth Wallington, Housing Register Officer
Cathy Dodson, Housing Options Team Leader
Andrew Wheldon, Principal Benefits Officer
Roz Haines, Finance Manager: Community Services

Trade Union: n/a

Equality Impact Assessment – Stage One

Name of item being assessed:	Amendment to the Allocation Policy
Version and release date of item (if applicable):	
Owner of item being assessed:	Mel Brain
Name of assessor:	Mel Brain
Date of assessment:	02 September 2011

1. What are the main aims of the item?
The item proposes to amend the bedroom allowance for the allocation of social housing, to bring it into line with the LHA regulations for private rented accommodation, to make best use of a scarce resource and to ensure equity across the tenures.

2. Note which groups may be affected by the item, consider how they may be affected and what sources of information have been used to determine this. (Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Religion or Belief and Sexual Orientation.)
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Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this.
Age	N/A	The Allocation Policy ensures that social housing is allocated on the basis of housing need. The proposed amendment does not change entitlement to social housing.
Disability	In some circumstances, people with a disability may require an additional bedroom for an overnight carer. The LHA Regulations allow for an additional bedroom to meet this need and the proposed policy follows the LHA guidelines.	The Allocation Policy ensures that social housing is allocated on the basis of housing need. The proposed amendment does not change entitlement to social housing. The policy has allowed consideration of an additional bedroom where there is evidence to support this need, for example, because a carer needs to stay overnight.
Gender	N/A	The Allocation Policy ensures that social housing is allocated on the basis of housing need. The proposed amendment does not change entitlement to

		social housing
Race	N/A	The Allocation Policy ensures that social housing is allocated on the basis of housing need. The proposed amendment does not change entitlement to social housing
Religion	N/A	The Allocation Policy ensures that social housing is allocated on the basis of housing need. The proposed amendment does not change entitlement to social housing
Sexual Orientation	N/A	The Allocation Policy ensures that social housing is allocated on the basis of housing need. The proposed amendment does not change entitlement to social housing
Further comments relating to the item:		
The amendment seeks to bring the social housing policy into line with national LHA regulations applicable to the private rented sector.		

3. Result (please tick by double-clicking on relevant box and click on 'checked')	
<input type="checkbox"/>	High Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medium Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Low Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No Relevance - This does not need to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment

For items requiring a Stage 2 equality impact assessment, begin the planning of this now, referring to the equality impact assessment guidance and Stage 2 template.

4. Identify next steps as appropriate:	
Stage Two required	
Owner of Stage Two assessment:	
Timescale for Stage Two assessment:	
Stage Two not required:	X

Name: Mel Brain

Date: 02 September 2011