

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**DATE:** 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

#### **REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME 2013-18**

1. **Purpose of Report**

This report requests comments & consideration from the panel in relation to reviewing Slough Borough Council's Allocations Policy 2013-2018.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

That the Committee considers and comments on the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy detailed in section 5.4 of this report.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA, Five Year Plan and Housing Strategy**

The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA

3.1 Housing is one of the key priorities of Slough's Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS). It contributes to reducing inequalities in health through access to high quality housing. There are clear links between housing and the JSNA priorities around improving health conditions, particularly mental health and protecting vulnerable children.

3.2 **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Outcome 4 of Slough's new Five Year Plan 2017-2021 states: "Our residents will have access to good quality homes". This outcome recognises the critical links between improved health and wellbeing and affordable good quality housing.

3.3 **Housing Strategy**

Slough's Housing Strategy sets out the council's shared vision and priorities to provide sufficient, good quality, affordable housing. Theme 4 of the strategy commits: "The Scheme of Allocation for social housing will be reviewed to look at the priority for homeless people and vulnerable groups...".

#### 4. **Other Implications**

##### (a) **Financial**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, indirectly there are very significant financial implications for the Council giving the rising numbers of homeless families residing in expensive temporary accommodation with some households having no realistic exit opportunities.

##### (b) **Risk Management**

There are no risk management implications arising from this report

##### (c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

The existing scheme has previously been reviewed by Counsel and recently in relation to non-dependents, as legally compliant. Therefore there are no Human Rights and legal implications arising from this report.

##### (d) **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The Council has a public sector duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation in order to promote equality of opportunity to all persons and to those who share a protected characteristic under the legislation.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been conducted which has highlighted areas of concern particularly how the council deals with applicants having some need to move on medical/welfare grounds.

#### 5. **Background Information**

5.1 The Housing Act 1996. 166A (3) is the primary legislation which sets out statutory reasonable preference categories:

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Housing Act 1996 Part 7);
- (b) people who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under Housing Act 1996 section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under section 192(3);
- (c) people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including any grounds relating to a disability); and
- (e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

5.2 The introduction of the Localism Act 2011 enabled local authorities to make local decisions on who should be given priority for an allocation of social housing. The Council changed its housing allocation scheme in January 2014 after a consultation with residents and stakeholders. The adopted scheme prioritised applicants:

- Living in Slough for a continuous period of 5 years
- Working/volunteering/being in work-related training
- Fostering or adopting
- Having served in the armed forces
- Looked after children
- Social housing tenants under occupying their home
- The right to move – (regulations 2015)

### **5.3 Consultation on the proposed changes to the Scheme**

5.3.1 The consultation journey of the proposed changes to the Allocations Scheme started on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2017, where a Members' Seminar discussed the original proposed changes.

5.3.2 Members discussed the proposed changes further at the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Officers considered what Members said about the proposed changes over both sessions and presented a revised (proposed) Allocations Scheme to a further Members' Seminar on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018. This report includes any suggested amendments arising from that seminar.

### **5.4 Proposed Changes**

5.4.1 The changes with some explanation as to why these are being proposed are as Follows: -

#### **5.4.1.1 Community Contribution**

5.4.1.1.1 It is proposed that the Community Contribution priority be changed from one year to six months.

5.4.1.1.2 The current scheme requires those with a community contribution to have been in employment, volunteering or work related training for a continuous period of 12 months. It is also proposed that any person working in a school or college is not penalised by this criteria during holiday periods.

#### **5.4.1.2 Priority for Disability and Medical**

5.4.1.2.1 It is proposed that these households receive additional preference and band B priority.

5.4.1.2.2 Applicants assessed as having some need to move on medical/welfare grounds are placed in band C. As at the end of March 2017 there were 69 applicants meeting this requirement. It is unlikely that those placed in band C on medical priority (unless in need of older persons accommodation) would ever receive an offer of social housing due to the large demand from band B.

#### **5.4.1.3 One Offer Only**

5.4.1.3.1 It is proposed that the current two offer policy is changed to one offer only.

5.4.1.3.2 The current scheme enables two offers of social housing to be made. In the last year 123 offers of council property were refused. In some cases newly built properties were refused because there was no Right to Buy or Right to Acquire. A legal review process is in place to deal with the suitability of all offers.

5.4.1.3.3 Exceptions will be made for those under occupying homes, however, applicants may re-apply to the register after a period of 24 months after an unreasonable refusal of a suitable offer.

#### **5.4.1.4 Owner Occupiers**

5.4.1.4.1 It is proposed that in exceptional circumstances owner occupiers are able to join the Housing Register for an offer of designated housing for the over 60s.

5.4.1.4.2 Owner occupiers are currently unable to join the Housing Register. Some older persons may benefit from a move into older persons housing. A provision of selling or leasing the existing home must be in place to facilitate any offer.

#### **5.4.1.5 Homelessness**

5.4.1.5.1 It is proposed that qualifying homeless households are transferred to band B irrespective of community contribution. It is also proposed that other agreed homeless households who do not meet the 5 year residence criteria are placed into band C irrespective of community contribution.

5.4.1.5.2 The current scheme awards an additional preference to agreed homeless households who meet the community contribution criteria. It is well documented that due to external influences (welfare reform, higher private rental costs, migration from London boroughs) there has been a significant rise in the number of households in temporary accommodation. Such placements are costly and place an additional burden upon the General Fund.

5.4.1.5.3 Homeless households not meeting the community contribution criteria are unlikely to receive an offer of accommodation from the register. This is also because a number of homeless households do not meet the residence criteria of 5 years living in Slough.

#### **5.4.1.6 Key Workers**

5.4.1.6.1 It is proposed that key workers (Teachers and Social Workers dealing with vulnerable adults and children) are given reasonable preference when joining the Housing Register in relation to the specific pilot scheme being adopted in 2018/19.

5.4.1.6.2 There is a commitment in the Housing Strategy to provide accommodation for key workers dealing with vulnerable adults and children.

## **6. Comments of Other Committees**

6.1 The proposed changes outlined in Section 5.4 are as a result of extensive consultation and discussions with Councillors as indicated in Section 5.3.

7. **Conclusion**

7.1 Rationing access to Council or housing association homes is an unfortunate reality given the worsening supply and demand situation in Slough. It is right that the Council strikes the right balance between aspiration and dealing with deep-seated needs issues.

7.2 Letters outlining the proposed changes have been sent to all households on the Housing Register. It is expected that once the consultation ends and the Council takes account of the comments received, the scheme will be signed off by delegated authority and go live on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018.

8. **Appendices**

None

9. **Background Papers**

Housing Allocation Scheme 2013-2018  
Equality Impact assessment  
Homeseekers Newsletter 2017-18