

3b **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Outcome 4 of the Five Year Plan 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.

3c **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 to "The Scheme of Allocation for social housing will be reviewed to look at the priority homeless people and vulnerable groups receive".

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

(b) Risk Management

There are no risk management implications arising from this report

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights or other 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 and to promote equality of opportunity to all persons and to those who share a protected characteristic under the legislation. A full EIA was undertaken in preparation for a review of the scheme and this is still valid. However, this will be refreshed on the anniversary of the new scheme going live.

(e) Workforce

There are no workforce implications arising from this report.

5 **Supporting Information**

5.1 The Housing Act 1996, 166A 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)

There are no plans to change these priority groups.

5.3 On the 7th September 2017 the Neighborhood & Community Services Scrutiny Panel were asked to comment on proposed changes to the existing scheme, which are outlined below. This was followed with a dedicated Members' Seminar on the 27th February 2018. A final consideration was presented at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 15th March 2018.

5.4 In February 2018 a short consultation was launched. All those on the Housing Register (2,498), internal and external partners and the Tenants' Board were asked for comments on the main proposals of change to the existing scheme:

- Reducing the community contribution qualification period from 12 months to six months
 - 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.
- Re-prioritise agreed homeless cases to meet the urgent needs for new households requiring temporary accommodation.
 - 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.
 - 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.

- Reducing the number of offers of accommodation to one offer only with some discretion towards under occupiers. This will be a reasonable offer and if refused will still be able to be reviewed as set out in legislation.
 - 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 and the same will apply in the new scheme.
 - 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.
- Awarding households with a proven severe medical need or disability a Band B placement
 - 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.
- Assisting Key Workers
 - 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.
 - There is a commitment in the Housing Strategy to provide accommodation for key workers dealing with vulnerable adults and children.

5.5 At the close of the consultation period the council received 21 written responses (note that responses are multi-faceted).

	AGREE	DISAGREE
COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION – 6 MONTHS	10	5
HOMELESS RE PRIORITISE	12	1
OFFERS – ONE	3	13
MEDICAL – BAND B	16	1
KEY WORKERS	10	3

5.6 The current scheme disqualifies owner – occupiers from joining the housing register. There are, on rare occasions, that under the exceptional circumstances clause officers may treat an older owner-occupier having an exceptional need for older persons designated accommodation.

6. **Conclusion**

Social Housing is a scarce resource and supply always outstrips demand. The proposed changes to the policy will enable the council to target those in the most housing need, dealing with the increased demand for temporary accommodation, whilst retaining awarding additional preference to those vulnerable groups and helping those making a community contribution.

7 **Appendices Attached (if any)**

'A' Housing Allocations Scheme

'B' EIA

8 **Background Papers**

None