

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 15th January 2019

CONTACT OFFICER: Colin Moone, Service Lead, Housing Services
(For all enquiries) (01753) 474057

WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME 2018-2022

1 Purpose of Report

This report provides the Scrutiny Panel with an update on the first six months of the new Housing Allocations Scheme 2018-2022 as requested by members. Statistical information given is for the period 1st May – 31st October 2018.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel is requested to note the report and the impact of changes on specific groups affected by the main changes to the Allocations Policy.

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

3a Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

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.

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.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no direct financial implications of proposed action.

(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.

(e) Workforce

There are no workforce implications.

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 enables local authorities to make local decisions on who should be given priority for an allocation of social housing.

5.3 The main changes to the scheme are:

- Reduce the community contribution qualification period from 12 months to six months
- Re-prioritise agreed homeless cases to meet the urgent needs for new households requiring temporary accommodation
- Reduce the number of offers of accommodation to one offer only with some

- discretion towards under occupiers
- Awarding households with a proven severe medical need, Band B placement
- Assist Key Workers

5.4 Community Contribution

836 applicants from band C were contacted individually asking if their circumstances met the new community contribution criteria. Responses came in from a number of applicants with an increase of 101 applicants meeting these criteria and moving to Band B. The total on the register in Band B at the end of April 2018 was 1097 and at the end of May 1198.

5.5 Homelessness

Agreed homeless households meeting the qualification criteria for the scheme are now awarded an additional preference (Band B). 147 homeless households have benefitted from this change.

Below represents a snapshot of the housing register by banding for statutory agreed homeless households before and after the changes to the policy.

	April 2018	May 2018
BAND B	70	217
BAND C	138	92
NOT ELIGIBLE	106	0
TOTAL	314	309

Case Study 1

Ms X was living in a one bedroom flat with her two children aged 6 & 3 when the landlord served a section 21 notice asking her to leave. Ms X was already registered on the housing waiting list from March 2012. Ms X had lived in Slough since 1992.

A possession order was granted to the landlord and Ms X was then placed into temporary accommodation in March 2017. A positive decision on her case was made. However Ms X had no real prospect of a move via the housing register prior to May 2018. Following the changes to the scheme officers were in a position to make an offer of accommodation in May 2018 to resolve her homelessness situation and free up a unit of temporary accommodation.

5.6 Medical priority

77 applications transferred from band C into Band B attracting an additional preference due to medical reasons. The majority of applicants in Band C would be unlikely to receive an offer of accommodation.

Case Study 2

Mr Y is 52 years old and had been on the housing waiting list from May 2008. He had been residing with family members in Slough for over 40 years. Mr Y was registered blind. His application had been awarded a Band C placement due to his medical condition following advice taken from an independent medical advisor.

Changes to the policy now meant that Mr Y was placed into Band B and an offer of accommodation was made to him in May 2018.

5.7 One offer only

We have already seen a dramatic fall in the number of refusals of offers made since the introduction of a one offer only policy.

The table below represents the allocations activity for the first six months of the scheme for offers of Slough Borough Council property in comparison with the previous four years.

YEAR	REFUSALS	LETTINGS DONE
May-Oct 2018	34	150
May-Oct 2017	65	128
May-Oct 2016	77	125
May-Oct 2015	108	167
May-Oct 2014	171	138

Members concerns about the consequences of a one offer only policy were noted. Some members had additional concerns about under occupiers on the register. The policy allows officers some discretion when dealing with the refusal of offers made to under occupiers. The Council has also increased payments made under the Tenants Incentive Scheme to facilitate a move.

Applicants have the right to a review on the suitability of any offer made. In the first six months of the scheme nine reviews were submitted regarding the suitability of the offer made. The reviewing officers upheld each case as a suitable offer.

In this lettings period nine under occupiers viewed and accepted offers. Eight of these accepted the first offer made and only one applicant refused who then went on to accept a second offer.

A further seven applicants were offered property and refused the offer made. Two of these applicants wished to have their application cancelled and a further four applicants are waiting for a second offer to be made. No under occupiers have been cancelled as a direct result of refusing an offer.

Case Study 3

Ms Z joined the housing register in June 2008 living in private rented accommodation.

Ms Z has three children and was residing in a 2 bedroom privately rented flat. She was offered a three bedroom house approximately four miles away from her current home. Ms Z refused the offer as she did not like the neighborhood and believed that gang crime was prevalent in the area. Following the refusal of this offer Ms Z was removed from the housing register. She did not ask for a review of this decision and was happy to remain in her current home.

5.8 Key Workers

Two key workers employed in Slough schools have joined the housing register. Offers of accommodation with James Elliman Homes will be made in due course.

5.9 Lettings made in the first 6 months of the scheme

202 social housing lettings have been made. The table below represents the band and reason for the banding together with the total numbers let to each group.

BAND	REASON	TOTAL
BAND A	ADAPTED PROPERTY	3
BAND A	DECANT	1
BAND A	EXCEPTIONAL CASE	3
BAND A	HOMELESS	17
BAND A	MEDICAL	3
BAND A	SEVERE OVERCROWDING	1
BAND A	SUCCESSION	5
BAND A	WELFARE	18
BAND B	CARE LEAVER	1
BAND B	HOMELESS	30
BAND B	MEDICAL	26
BAND B	UNDER OCCUPIER	9
BAND B	WORKING	77
BAND C	LOCALITY	1
BAND C	HOMELESS NO DUTY	1
BAND C	SHARING	6

6. Conclusion

Cabinet approved the Housing Allocations Policy on 16th April 2018.

The Council implemented a new scheme on 1st May 2018 for the Allocation of social housing following an undertaking to do so in its outcome plan.

The scheme is the policy by which the Council and other social housing is allocated as set out in the Housing Act 1996, Part V1 and Localism Act 2011.

Applications that have benefitted from the scheme are primarily those with medical needs or those that are statutory homeless.

The allocation of social housing is designed to help those who live in the most severe housing conditions. A one offer policy has further targeted these groups of need and those who refuse a reasonable offer can reapply after a two year period.

7 Appendices Attached

'A' Housing Allocations Scheme