

Briefing Note

Title: Housing Allocations Policy**Date: 14 August 2019****Prepared by: Mila Simpson****Job Title: Service Lead Housing Strategy****Intended
Audience:**Internal ☐Partner organisation ☐Public ☒Confidential ☐

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 Following a review of the Council's housing Allocations Policy, the purpose of this briefing note is to summarise the key proposals being recommended for consultation as part of the development and adoption of a new housing Allocations Policy for the City.

2.0 Background and context

- 2.1 Local Authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 to have a scheme for determining priorities, and the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation both to first time applicants and transferring tenants including nominations to Registered Providers (Housing Associations) – The Allocations Policy. The Council's Allocations Policy as a choice based letting (CBL) scheme was adopted in 2007 and has been subject to periodic updates to ensure it keeps abreast of changing legislation and external challenges. It was last amended in April 2018 to account for new duties introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 2.2 The first wholesale review of the current Allocations Policy was initiated in January 2019. This has involved the establishment of a Steering Group consisting of Housing Strategy officers, Wolverhampton Homes representatives, Tenant Management Organisations and Legal colleagues who have met regularly to consider a range of data and evidence to assess how best the Allocations Policy should be updated. This has resulted in a series of recommendations that are proposed for consultation.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 The revised objectives for the Allocations Policy are recommended below and reflect the need for the Council to make best use of a limited resource that is of high demand, whilst meeting its statutory responsibilities. To do this the Council will provide advice and information to enable applicants to make informed and realistic choices, making use of a range of housing options and tenures to alleviate housing needs.

Revised Allocations Policy Objectives

- i) Ensure people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing that best meets their needs.
- ii) Make use of a range of housing options and tenures to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- iii) Make best use of the Council's and partner registered providers' housing stock.
- iv) Manage applicants' expectations by being realistic about stock availability, to support them in making informed choices about their housing options, and the extent to which they are able to express reasonable preference.
- v) Ensure that the Council's legal duties and corporate responsibilities are met and that they contribute to delivering the Council's priorities.

3.2 The proposals being put forward for consideration have been recommended based on their alignment with these objectives.

3.3 A number of proposals are recommended that support the Council in meeting its Legal and Corporate responsibilities. This includes the addition of a new band, 'Emergency Plus', that will give additional priority to applicants with a full homelessness duty who are also care leavers, members of the armed forces, require a substantially adapted property, are significantly overcrowded or anyone who requires immediate rehousing due to a significant threat to life, to ensure those with the highest level of need are given the most priority. There are further proposals to support those residents committed to adopting and fostering access appropriately sized homes to enable them to do this and increasing the priority given to Care Leavers on the housing register to assist them in securing settled accommodation.

3.4 A more consistent and fair approach is being proposed for households that are overcrowded. For example, it is recommended that the largest overcrowded families can improve their housing situation by moving to a property where they may still over-occupy but to a lesser extent than before to help reduce the time they are severely overcrowded for, that the priority of overcrowded families living in one-bedroom properties is increased and that any household that is overcrowded has a greater priority than households that do not access to a private garden, which is not the case currently.

3.5 There are a number of changes being put forward for consideration that will make best use of the affordable homes there are in the City, helping to reduce waiting times for some of the most needed property types. For example, due to the limited number of level access properties becoming available it is recommended that ground floor flats are given priority to those with a mobility requirement, rather than the current approach of giving priority to those aged 55 or over. It is also recommended that those applicants assessed as having no housing need no longer sit on the housing register, freeing up 10% of all properties let in a year for those in housing need. This would mean that the 98% of over 5,000 households in Band 4 that are not successful in accessing a Council home will be better served by understanding and accessing their available housing options such as quality private

rental properties through Rent with Confidence or home ownership, including the packages of assistance that can make it more affordable.

- 3.6 So that people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing, it is recommended that the local connection allowance of a quarter of all properties being prioritised based on the need to live in a particular area, rather than the need to be housed in suitable accommodation is removed. As the Council operates a choice based lettings allocation scheme, applicants retain the choice as to the location of properties on which they bid. Furthermore, the allocations policy gives priority to applicants that need to move to a particular location to be in close proximity to provide essential care to someone. This change will also reduce potential equality implications that could arise as the number and type of social housing is spread disproportionately across the city. It is also proposed that the right will be retained to temporarily prevent applicants from bidding on properties in particular areas or of particular types where there is evidence of a threat to the safety of themselves and/or others. This will assist in applicants accessing housing suitable for their needs and will be applied on a case by case basis, be regularly reviewed and open to review should the applicant request it.
- 3.7 As a further piece of work, it is proposed to undertake a feasibility study of establishing an Accessible Housing register to improve accessibility to adapted properties for those applicants that require them, by improving the information held across the housing stock of the appropriateness of each property for the type and scale of adaptation.
- 3.8 The full list of proposals is set out at Appendix 1, with the rationale provided for each of the recommended changes to the Allocations Policy resulting from the review.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 A six-week public consultation will take place to test the proposals and also identify other emerging issues that need further consideration and incorporation into the recommendations.
- 4.2 The operational and resource implications of the proposals will be understood to establish a cost and timeline for implementation.
- 4.3 The final proposals will be taken through the Council's governance processes including pre-decision scrutiny at Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel before final recommendations are put to Cabinet in January 2020.