

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Cabinet 11 November 2020
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Report title	Housing Allocations Policy Implementation	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Jaqueline Sweetman City Assets and Housing	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook, Director for City Environment	
Originating service	Housing Strategy	
Accountable employee	Henry Gregory Tel Email	Housing Customer Insight Manager 01902 555159 Henry.gregory@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	City Environment Leadership Team	13 October 2020

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve amendments to the Housing Allocations Policy as detailed in paragraph 3.6 of the report.
2. Approve an extension to the implementation of the Housing Allocations Policy.
3. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Environment, to authorise a 'go live date' for the Housing Allocations Policy.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to extend the implementation period of the revised Housing Allocations Policy which was approved at the meeting of the Cabinet, 19 February 2020.
- 1.2 The report also seeks approval for minor amendments to the policy as a result of issues identified during the implementation period.

2.0 Background

- 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.
- 2.2 City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) own over 22,000 properties within the city, that are managed across five managing agents; Wolverhampton Homes and the city's four tenant management organisations (TMOs), who are all required to allocate and let the properties they manage in accordance with the Allocations Policy.
- 2.3 Following a full review of the Allocations Policy throughout 2019, including a six-week public consultation period, Cabinet approved a revised Housing Allocations Policy in February 2020. The implementation of the new policy was agreed to be staggered, with the elements of the policy not reliant on the development of a new ICT system to be introduced in April 2020, while the full policy would be implemented in February 2021 following the development of a new Northgate ICT system, which is used by Wolverhampton Homes to manage the allocations process.

3.0 Progress

Policy Implementation

- 3.1 The elements of the revised policy that were not dependent on the development of a new ICT system have been implemented and have been in operation since April 2020.
- 3.2 The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic one month after the official launch of the project to implement the revised Allocations Policy has had a significant impact on the project's timeline. The Council and its Managing Agents were required to focus on day to day service delivery rather than on projects that aim to improve those services for customers in the longer term. As such, the technical work that was scheduled to be completed on the Project was delayed by a number of months, while officers focused on providing emergency services including prioritising the housing of rough sleepers and those in temporary accommodation. This resulted in project officers not having the capacity to progress the work required to keep in line with the timescale during the lockdown period.

- 3.3 Whilst work has since commenced on the project, its delivery is reliant on the work of Northgate consultants to support the build of a new ICT system. The Council has been advised that due to the delay in the project timeline it will not be possible to complete this work by the approved date of February 2021, Cabinet is therefore asked to approve the extension of the initial implementation date.
- 3.4 Cabinet is also asked to approve the delegation of authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing in consultation with the Director for City Environment to authorise a revised 'go live date' of the new policy once the Council has been satisfied that the new system meets all technical requirements.
- 3.5 If the recommendations of the report are approved, all applicants on the housing register will be informed of the extended implementation period of the revised policy.

Minor Policy Amendments

- 3.6 Whilst developing the technical specification for the new ICT system, a number of suggested policy amendments have been identified which were not detailed during the initial review of the Allocations Policy:

Section 11.5 of the Allocations Policy (Appendix 1), details the circumstances in which applicants will be given lesser preference and have their application suspended until such time their reason for lesser preference has been resolved. One scenario where an applicant would be considered as having lesser preference is in instances where an applicant owes debts of more than £400 to a Council or Registered Provider or more than £600 where Universal Credit is a contributing factor. Currently, this does not apply to applicants who are being supported to move due to domestic violence, it is recommended that this exemption is extended to cover applicants who qualify for 'Band 1 Social Grounds', as detailed in paragraph 15.2 of the policy.

Paragraph 7.5 of the Policy sets out the maximum level of income and/or assets required in order to be eligible for an allocation, it is recommended that an exemption is added to this requirement for applicants who are moving due to domestic violence through the means of a case conference, as set out in paragraph 19.5 of the policy.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 Option one would be to implement the recommendations of the report, ensuring the Council is meeting its legislative requirements and is responding to the current operating environment as reflected by the revised policy objectives, including making best use of homes and ensuring those in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity for accessing suitable accommodation.
- 4.2 Option two would be to not implement the recommendations of this report, this would result in the new Allocations Policy not being implemented by the originally approved date of February 2021, this option is therefore not recommended.

5.0 Reasons for decision

- 5.1 Option one will ensure the Allocations Policy remains as fit for purpose as it can be dependent on the development of the IT system. This is important as allocations policies make decisions that change people's lives and housing opportunities and so need to reflect the latest legislation, regulation, case law and the local market.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The one-off costs for the development of the Northgate system, estimated in the region of £10,000 were approved in the Cabinet report of February 2020, these costs remain unchanged by the recommendations of the report.

[JM/02102020/B]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council as a Local Housing Authority is required to allocate housing accommodation in accordance with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. Section 167 of the Act requires the Authority to have an allocation scheme and to allocate housing accommodation in accordance with the scheme.

[RP/02102020/A]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 An equalities analysis has been undertaken, which demonstrates the positive intentions of the changes to the Allocations Policy. There has been ongoing liaison with CWC's Equalities Team throughout the development and implementation phase of the Allocations Policy to ensure applicants are clearly communicated with and are supported in the reassessment of their housing application where needed, so that those vulnerable people with housing needs receive the appropriate priority on the housing register.
- 8.2 The recommendations of this report do not change the equalities implications identified within the analysis, however they do extend the timeline in which they will be achieved.

9.0 Climate change and environmental implications

- 9.1 There are no climate change and environmental implications arising from this report.

10.0 Human resources implications

- 10.1 Implementation of the revised Allocations Policy will come from existing CWC, Wolverhampton Homes and TMO officers. Some development support will be required from Northgate as set out in the Financial Implications section of the report.

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 11.1 This report relates to properties within the Housing Revenue Account and therefore has no Corporate Landlord implications.

12.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

12.1 Revisions to the Allocations Policy aim to give those in greatest housing need the greatest opportunity for accessing suitable housing. This can help alleviate issues such as homelessness, overcrowding and the need for an accessible home. Satisfying households housing needs should have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

13.0 Covid implications

13.1 There are no COVID implications arising from this report.

14.0 Schedule of background papers

14.1 [Cabinet report, 19 February 2020 – Allocations Policy Review](#)

15.0 Appendices

15.1 Appendix 1 – Housing Allocations Policy