

# New Housing Allocations Policy Impact

Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel  
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Presenter:

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## Background

- Local Authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 to have a scheme for determining priorities, and the procedure to be followed when allocating housing accommodation.
- The Council's Allocations Policy was adopted in 2007 and is managed through a choice based lettings scheme (CBL) - Homes in the City
- Wholesale review in 2019 with Cabinet approval in 2020.
- Some changes required significant changes to the CBL system delaying full policy implementation until September 2021.
- Review in February 2022 resulted in further minor changes to the policy with subsequent approval via IEDN in April 2022.

## New Allocations Policy Objectives

- Ensure people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing that best meet their needs.
- Make use of a range of housing options and tenures to prevent and alleviate homelessness.
- Make best use of the Council's and partner registered providers housing stock
- 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.
- Ensure that the Council's legal duties and corporate responsibilities are met and that they contribute to delivering the Council's priorities.

## Recap - Main Policy Changes

- A new banding priority for foster carers and those approved to adopt who require a larger property.
- Increased priority for Wolverhampton Care Leavers and exemption from residency requirements up to the age of 25.
- Introduction of an Emergency + Band
- Ensure that Council housing is awarded only to those most in housing need.
- Remove the 1 in 4 of all properties being let to those with a local connection over those with the greatest housing need.
- Increasing the amount of tolerated debt from £60 to £400 (or £600 if Universal credit is involved).
- Same sex children are able to share a bedroom until they are 21.
- Increased priority of overcrowded families living on one-bedroom properties
- Allow the largest families that are overcrowded to move to a property where they will still over-occupy but to a lesser extent.
- Extend the preference of 10% of properties to lower bands (Band 2/3) to include Band 1

## Waiting List Data

- The table shows the numbers of applicants in each band on the waiting list as at 19 September 2022. There were 4,930 applicants on the list. Prior to the implementation of the new policy in September 2021 and the removal of Band 4, the list had over 11,000 applicants.
- Revising the Allocations Policy to focus on those in the greatest need of social housing ensures that the Council can apply its resource into greater support to not only those, but by providing advice and assistance; assist others into other types of tenure.
- With this renewed focus came the introduction of a new band, 'Emergency Plus'. This new band recognises the needs of those who are not only homeless but have significant additional needs, this includes people with disabilities who need purpose built/adapted homes and allows the Council to identify those needs early and speeds up the process of allocating a suitable property.

<b><u>Application Category Code</u></b>	<b><u>Numbers</u></b>
Band One	1791
Band Two	1950
Band Three	674
Emergency	499
Emergency Plus	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>4930</b>

## Supply and Demand

- Available council housing for people in housing need is becoming increasingly scarce. In the financial year 2020/21, the number of properties becoming available to let was 956. So far in the current financial year there have been 411 properties become available to relet so we are predicting less than 900 homes will become available to relet this financial year:
  - For the financial year 2020/2021 the average was 76 properties per month.
  - To date, for the financial year 2022/2023 the average is 69 properties per month
- The highest level of demand is for two and three bed houses and bungalows. Significantly, 67% of properties coming up for let last year were flats and maisonettes.
- In the financial year, 2021-2022, there has been a total of 55 bungalows become available, nine of which cannot be relet due to redevelopment works.
- For the same period, 262 houses became available with only 7 four beds coming up for let and no five or six bed homes.
- Often there are more than 200 plus bids placed advertised houses.

## Housing Applications

- There were around 16,000 applications made to Homes in the City between September 2021 and October 2022. Social housing is not only a more affordable form of housing, it offers a security of tenure unmatched with any other housing provider and remains the first choice for many in the City of Wolverhampton.
- The table demonstrates a sample of the number of applications received each month. The number of applications has risen year on year with the trend continuing, despite the Council no longer having an open register
- Utilisation of bids affects waiting time; an applicant not able to take advantage of their full bidding allocation each week (i.e. three bids) may find it much longer to be rehoused especially if only bidding on 'in demand' properties.
- There are currently 21 households living in temporary accommodation requiring 4 or 5 bedrooms with the average time these applicants have been placed in temporary accommodation being almost nine months.

Year	Month	Number of applications
2019-2020	August	376
	September	310
	October	377
2020-2021	November	306
	August	389
	September	495
2022-2023	October	496
	November	566
	July	624
2021-2022	August	712
	September	702

# Lettings Team Enquiries

- The Lettings Team receive the highest number of enquiries from MP's and Councillors of all sections within Wolverhampton Homes. On average, over 650 enquiries are received each year from Councillors and MP's. The main reason for the enquiry is:
  - constituents not being offered a property they have bid on
  - dissatisfaction with the priority banding awarded to their application
  - the length of time they have been on the housing register
- The number of enquiries is not inclusive of customer enquiries received via the website, by email or by phone



# Continuing Service Improvement

- 61% of all allocations made in financial year 2022/2023 so far are to applicants with households with some level of homeless priority.
- The Allocations Policy is adhered to across all of the managing agents. There is transparency in relation to any offers made and the outcome of those offers. Significantly, there have been no challenges made against the Council in relation to its application of the policy.
- Void turnaround was significantly delayed as a result of the global pandemic, at its highest, there was 150 voids awaiting works. This now at around 50 and improving monthly.
- The Homes in the City platform has been modernised and now sits within the Council website.
- Relationships between City housing team and Lettings are open and transparent as are the relationships between lettings and other areas of Wolverhampton Homes and priority is given to ensuring that those in the greatest housing need are housed as swiftly as possible.

# New Housing Supply.

- The Council continues to prioritise the increase of supply of affordable housing in the City and has a number of schemes to support this intention. In 2021-2022, 28 former council homes were purchased and put back into Council stock. So far in 2022-2023, six properties have been purchased with seven more awaiting completion.
- Private Sector Housing have put 20 empty homes back into use in the first two quarters of 2022-2023.
- Homes developed through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) continues and the first phase of homes being developed in Heath Town will become available shortly. This will see 16 four bed houses and 24 2 bed houses added to Council stock.
- The small sites programme will see a further 34 homes developed and there are two community led developments in Bushbury and Heath Town that will result in a further 14 properties.
- WV Living have brought forward a total of 266 homes on The Marches development in Wednesfield. – 99 for outright sale, 100 Help to Own, 29 Affordable Rent and 28 Shared Ownership. Hampton Park, Bushbury will bring forward 178 homes – 133 Outright Sale, 29 Affordable Rent and 16 Shared Ownership.

# City Wide Housing Advice and Support.

- The Council works closely with a variety of partners across the City who contribute greatly to offering housing advice and support.
- Both the Council's website and Homes in the City offers guidance and support on housing options and ensures that the platforms are accessible to all using assistive technology, allowing users to interact with the website in a way that suits them best. Wolverhampton Homes Lettings Team offer a range of services including face to face sign ups, interpreter services, home visits, WhatsApp and text alongside email and telephone, seeking to provide a full range of services that can be tailored to meet an applicants needs.
- The Council's Rent with Confidence scheme is inclusive of both a preventative and targeted approach in addressing the quality and availability of private rented housing.
- Rent with Confidence scheme has introduced a 'Call us First' scheme aimed at private sector landlords and letting agents operating in the City. The scheme asks landlords and letting agents to give early indication that they are planning to serve notice on a tenant to terminate their tenancy.
- An Allocations Policy training module is available for all staff members.
- City Housing has established a bi monthly meeting bringing providers of social housing in the City together

## Questions for Scrutiny to Consider

How can we, as a City Housing Team better support Councillors and their constituents with their understanding of the level of housing need and social housing availability in the City.

What could we do better to support and encourage residents to take up alternative housing options?

How can we better communicate with each other and support our residents in a meaningful way, perhaps consider developing Councillor access to housing allocation data for each ward to help inform initial enquiries before submitting a formal enquiry?

Is there anything that would be useful to Councillors that City Housing could provide on a regular basis so as we can ensure that you are kept informed generally of housing related issues, good practice etc?

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