

**Decision Maker:** **Adult & Community Policy Development & Scrutiny,  
Adult & Community Portfolio Holder**

**Date:** **2<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER 2010**

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent                      Non-Executive                      Non-Key

**Title:** **HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME REVIEW**

**Contact Officer:** Sara Bowrey, Head of Housing Needs  
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**Chief Officer:** Terry Rich, Director of Adult & Community Services

**Ward:** BOROUGHWIDE

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1. Reason for report

- 1.1 Following on from the report to the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010 meeting of the A&C PDS Committee and Portfolio Holder, which approved the draft revised allocations scheme to be circulated for formal consultation, this report advises on the outcomes of the consultation and presents the final draft scheme for consideration.

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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 The PDS committee is recommended to: -

- a) Note and comment on the consultation findings,
- b) Comment on and subject to any amendments arising from these comments, recommend that the Portfolio Holder agree the revised draft scheme.

2.2 The Portfolio Holder is recommended to: -

- a) Consider the recommendations from the PDS committee,
- b) Subject to any suggested amendments to approve the proposed policy.
- c) Note that adoption will happen following implementation of the necessary amendments to the IT system supporting "Bromley Homeseekers" (Choice Based Lettings)
- d) Note that a review will take place in year 2 in order to assess the success of the changes in managing expectations and reducing time assessing applications.

## Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy. The proposed revised scheme replaces the existing scheme dated 2005 & remains in line with the overall aims & objectives of the existing policy.
  2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council.
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## Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated cost £1,380 grant already provided to facilitate implementation.
  2. Ongoing costs: Non-recurring cost.
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Housing Needs
  4. Total current budget for this head: £1,653k
  5. Source of funding: Area Based Grant grant - one off funding
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## Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 7.5 current FTE undertake the full range of statutory duties in relation housing allocations.
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
- 

## Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory requirement.
  2. Call-in: Call-in is applicable
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## Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): There are currently in excess of 6,700 households on the Housing Register with, on average a further 440 new applications being received each month.
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## Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? N/A.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Members' comments have been sought as part of the formal consultation process.

### 3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 The existing Housing Allocations Scheme, which was last updated in 2005, has been reviewed this year in order to:
- Update the policy in line with latest statutory guidance/directives to ensure operation of a 'fit for purpose' scheme.
  - Make the policy as transparent and easy to understand as possible, helping to dispel myths and assist in ensuring policy is perceived as fair.
  - Manage expectations by tightening the robustness of the assessment process including; reducing time taken to assess low banding applications with no realistic chance of receiving an offer of social rented housing and continuing the focus on meeting the highest level of housing need – a review will be carried out in year 2 to assess the success of this.
  - Further strengthen the link to alternative housing options and solutions to meet a range of housing needs as an alternative to applying to the housing register – with the expectation that all other viable options will be pursued.
  - Make full use of the increased flexibility contained within the latest guidance to reflect local priorities and consultation feedback.
  - Bring the numbers of highly banded applicants more in line with stock availability.
- 3.2 The initial stages of the review included desktop research on good practice, case law updates etc. benchmarking with other local authorities and consultation feedback including a number of focus groups covering internal and external partners as well as a range of service users. The initial draft of the revised scheme was presented to the A&C PDS Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010, and, in line with the Committee's recommendation, the Portfolio Holder approved the draft to be circulated for formal consultation during August and September.
- 3.3 From a wide range of consultees a total of 34 responses were received in addition to the comments received from the Housing, Health & Social Care Partnership Board, Homelessness Forum and South East London Housing Partnership (SELHP) partners. The feedback provided overall support for the proposed revisions to the scheme, with very few suggested amendments.
- 3.4 The Housing Allocations Scheme document has now been updated having regard to the consultation responses, most recent case law updates and good practice guidance. Copies of the full proposed revised scheme have been placed in the Members Room. Electronic copies of the revised scheme can be obtained from [lauren.wallis@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:lauren.wallis@bromley.gov.uk) . Appendix 1 provides a summary of the key proposed revisions, including the consultation response summaries and any subsequent revisions arising from this feedback.
- 3.5 If approved, the revised scheme will be subject to final formatting, including 'plain english testing' and production of a summary 'easy guide' for applicants before the anticipated implementation in April 2010. At this point all existing applicants will be invited to apply to be re-registered under the new scheme. Re-registration is required in order to obtain the necessary up to date information required to undertake an assessment of priority under the new banding regime. This exercise will also 'clear out' many non-active applications from the Register.
- 3.6 During this period the focus will be to support vulnerable and highly banded applicants to ensure they are able to re-register on the system before the old register is effectively closed. This will include telephone and visiting support to assist in the re-registration process.

- 3.7 An Equalities Impact Assessment, copies of which are available in the Members room, has been undertaken to ensure that the scheme complies with equality of access and service for all applicants, assessing that the statutory and local reasonable preference categories are fully reflected within the policy including assessment of waiting times against relative priority. The EIA also considers accessibility by ensuring advice, information and assistance is available to enable applicants to understand the scheme, apply to go onto the housing register and bid on Bromley Homeseekers. This includes ensuring resources are available to facilitate the re-registration process required to launch the revised scheme. Electronic copies of the revised scheme can be obtained from [lauren.wallis@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:lauren.wallis@bromley.gov.uk) .

#### *Implementation*

- 3.8 The current Housing Information System (Anite OHMS) does not provide the functionality required to implement auto banding, a key element of the revised scheme and essential to manage the workload and enable staff to pro-actively manage and work with applicants. Anite Local Government Systems was purchased by Northgate Ltd, who have their own housing product which does deliver the functionality required to implement auto banding and the new allocations scheme.
- 3.9 Officers are currently considering the best way to deliver autobanding. Scoping of the work involved and negotiations are ongoing internally and with Northgate to consider whether migration to their system is the preferred option to enable full implementation of the new policy and banding. It is currently aimed that this work will be complete by April 2011.

#### **4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of the policy review is to ensure that the policy adopted and operated by the London borough of Bromley and it's partner RSLs is fit for purpose, meeting all statutory and good practice requirements and reflecting local priorities and pressures in order to make best use of all available stock to meet housing need.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 A small grant of £1,380 has already been provided to the local authority to cover the cost of the Allocations review in light of the changes contained within the latest statutory guidance.
- 5.2 The work required to implement the revised policy will be contained within the approved budget for 2010/11.
- 5.3 Following the detailed analysis of requirements to deliver functionality for autobanding, there may be financial implications relating to any migration too an alternative system. Until this analysis has been completed these costs cannot be quantified.
- 5.4 The changes will also facilitate the completion of the efficiency targets set within the IE&E plan for housing needs which, whilst implemented, cannot be fully realised until the full implementation of the revised policy has been completed.

#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Council has a number of statutory obligations in relation to housing allocations. These include having a published criteria and policy which meets the requirements of the legislative framework and complies with current guidance and case law. The policy must detail both the priorities and procedures for operation of the scheme. All proposed changes are considered and approved by Legal Services to ensure compliance with the statutory framework.

6.2 There is also a statutory obligation to consult with RSLs, service users and partners who may have an interest in the scheme before any changes or updates are adopted.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	Personnel
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 Homelessness Act 2002 Bromley Allocation Policy (last updated 2005) Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, 2002 Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings, Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, 2008 Housing Allocations – Members of the Armed Forces (circular 04/2009), 2009 Fair and Flexible: Statutory Guidance on Social Housing Allocations for Local Authorities in England, 2009 A&CS PDS report and minutes for the 27 <sup>th</sup> July 2010 meeting.