

CABINET	AGENDA ITEM No. 13
20 NOVEMBER 2017	PUBLIC REPORT

Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Irene Walsh, Cabinet Member for Communities	
Contact Officer(s):	Sean Evans, Housing Needs Manager	Tel. 864083

PROPOSED CHANGES TO HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM: <i>Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee</i>	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that Cabinet recommend to Council approval of proposed changes to the Housing Allocations policy as set out in the report below.</p>	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to Cabinet following the Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 12 September 2017.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to consider the proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy in order to alleviate pressures to council services caused by higher levels of homelessness in the city.

2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3.2.1, ‘*To take collective responsibility for the delivery of all strategic Executive functions within the Council’s Major Policy and Budget Framework and lead the Council’s overall improvement programmes to deliver excellent services.*’

3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	YES	If Yes, date for relevant Cabinet Meeting	20 NOV 2017
Date for relevant Council meeting	13 DEC 2017	Date for submission to Government Dept.	N/A

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 The last year has been particularly challenging for the Housing Needs Team. In the period April 2016 - March 2017 the Council saw increasing levels of households presenting to the Council for assistance as they were homeless or threatened with homelessness. 1586 households presented to the Council as it was confirmed that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within the next 28 days. This represented an increase of 43% when compared to the previous year when 1109 presentations were made.

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- 4.2 Where a homelessness presentation is made to the Council and we are satisfied that the household may be homeless and eligible to make an application for assistance this triggers a duty upon the Council to investigate whether the household is owed a full housing duty and is “Accepted as Homeless”. This further investigation confirms the household is homeless or threatened with homelessness, takes into account any vulnerabilities of members of the household, the reasons for them becoming homeless and determines whether they have a connection with the City.
- 4.3 Homelessness both locally and nationally is predicted to increase over the next few years due to a number of factors, including the impact of Universal Credit, continuing Welfare Reform impacts and wider economic uncertainty as the UK negotiates its exit from the European Union. In addition, housing is in short supply across the country with the Government pledging to build 1 million new homes by 2020.
- 4.4 A number of areas of work are being developed in order to meet the challenge of homelessness for both the council and residents who will be affected. One of these areas is the proposed changes to the housing allocations policy
- 4.5 The Peterborough Homes allocations policy was last updated in 2014 and was amended significantly to reflect changes in demand, legislation and new powers following the Localism Act.
- 4.6 Since the changes were implemented, Peterborough along with many local authorities has seen an increase in demand from households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. At the same time changes to the bedroom standards policy driven by the removal of spare room subsidy has pushed additional demand on smaller 1 & 2 bedroom dwellings.
- 4.7 The impact of both of these pressures has meant that households who have presented to the Council as homeless have been provided with temporary accommodation and have been staying in the accommodation for longer.
- 4.8 With this in mind discussions between the Council and the partner Housing Associations have taken place and have made a number of recommendations, which if agreed and implemented should go some way to alleviate some of the pressures we are facing. The recommendations are as follows:

a) Under occupation - To allow households with a 2 bedroom need, with 2 children, who are working and will not be affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy to express interest in and be housed in 3 bedroom accommodation.

b) Additional Preference - Where the Council owes a full housing duty to a household, the household can sometimes miss out due to a lack of a strong local connection. It is proposed that a category for accepted homeless households who have been accepted for at least 3 months is added as an additional preference category.

c) Refusals and non-attendance at viewings - The demand for accommodation is now so great that we now no longer have the ability to give applicants extensive choice when it comes to allocations. Applicants are currently permitted to refuse up to 3 offers of accommodation before they are penalised. It is proposed that this be reduced to 2 offers for general applicants. No change is proposed for applicants who are accepted as homeless, they must still accept the 1st offer of suitable permanent accommodation.

d) Number of bids - Currently, applicants are able to bid on up to 3 properties per week. They could also shortlist for up to 3 properties per week. This has often resulted in delays in lettings and some applicants bidding for properties without any knowledge of the area the property is located in as they face no penalty. It is proposed that the number of bids applicants can place be reduced from 3 to 1. This

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should encourage applicants to review all properties in more detail and to place their bids on properties they are really interested in securing.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation has been undertaken with housing associations across Peterborough in developing these proposals.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- 6.1 The proposed changes to the housing allocations policy, if approved will help to increase the availability of housing to families where the council owes a housing duty to. This should reduce the time families spend in temporary accommodation.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To reduce time that families have to wait for accommodation and improve opportunities for housing for those families who are currently missing out on properties.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 The housing allocations policy could remain unchanged, however this will not help to address the housing issues that the council is facing.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no major implications to note.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 10.1 The Housing Allocations Policy
- 10.2 The Localism Act 2011

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