

SUBJECT:	Review of the Council's Allocation Scheme
DIRECTORATE:	Enterprise
MEETING:	Single Member Cabinet Decision
DATE:	19th July 2016
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To consider the proposed amendment to the common allocation policy between the Council and Monmouthshire, Melin and Charter Housing Associations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To recommend that Cabinet adopt the proposed policy amendments as soon as possible
See attached appendices: 1- Allocation Policy changes, 2 – Summary of Bands, 3 – Exclusion Policy, 4 – Customer Commitment, 5 – Quotas, 6 – Information Sharing, 7 – Eligibility & Allocations, 8, Housing Band Need, 9. Future Generation Evaluation

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Although no longer owning any housing stock, the Council still retains a statutory responsibility for the strategic identification of housing need and leading on all local actions to effectively respond to this need. In this regard, the [Monmouthshire] Housing Register is still a legal responsibility of the Council.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 The banding based Register is used to assess housing need, determine applicant priority and provides a basis for letting social housing. Applicants are prioritised using bands which reflect need and meets the Council's obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The scheme, known as Monmouthshire Homesearch, which is administered on behalf of the Council (and Melin and Charter Housing Associations) by Monmouthshire Housing, has been jointly reviewed by the Council and partners.

- 4.2 In addition to ensuring the policy continues to meet the Council's aims, the review, which has included consultation with applicants and local support agencies, particularly aimed to bring the Policy in line with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the new Welsh Government Allocations and Homelessness Code of Guidance. Improvements have also been made to incorporate best practice. Consultation has resulted in a number of comments all of which have been considered, in particular where it is proposed to move some applicants, who are not considered to be in need, from Band 4 to 5.

- 4.3 The main proposals are to:

- Update the aims and objectives to better align with the Single Integrated Plan, corporate priorities and the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. **(A1)**
- Update the Exclusion Policy **(A3)**
- Re-define Local Connection criteria from 6 out of past 12 months to 12 out of past 24 months. **(A1)**.
- Add dependent children including step children and adopted children as family association regarding local connection criteria. **(A1)**

- Homeless applicants owed a S75 duty will receive one suitable offer of accommodation via the allocation policy, rather than two, to discharge the Council's duty. Should the applicant refuse this offer, their banding would then be reassessed as per the allocations policy, dependent on their new circumstances. **(A1)**
- Homeowners will be given additional priority where they can evidence that they do not have the financial resources or equity in a property to purchase another suitable property **(A1)**
- Displaced Agricultural Workers to be added to Band 2. **(A1)**
- Create a Band 3B for those applicants threatened with homelessness with a likely priority need and owed a S66 or S73 duty. **(A2)**
- Adequately housed RSL tenants will be moved from Band 4 to Band 5, unless there is a medical or welfare priority. Tenants will be assessed accordingly **(A1)**
- All the above will be complimented by the introduction of an on-line Pre Assessment Model, providing bespoke advice for individual applicants.
- Continue to support sustainable communities
- Continue to support applicants to move to avoid hardship and to reduce the associated risks (for both applicants and the RSL's) of new tenants falling into arrears
- Continue to support the Council to discharge its homelessness duties through facilitating the turnaround of temporary accommodation
- Continue to offer choice whilst continuing to maximise best use of the stock
- Continue to allow applicants dependent on housing benefit to bid for properties that will allow under-occupation by up to one bedroom, but the RSL may withdraw an offer if under-occupation creates an affordability issue.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1** There are no financial implications with regards to the policy amendments. There is a cost implication to introducing the Pre-Assessment model of approximately £5,727. This cost has been covered by Welsh Government grant funding in 2015/16.

6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1** Equalities implications were identified in the assessment in relation to the proposal of reducing the Banding priority for adequately housed applicants. This will be mitigated against on a case by case basis in relation to physical bedroom size. Also, it is now **not** proposed to implement a change to reducing income thresholds as part of the assessment procedure on the basis of applicant feedback. **(Appendix 10)**

7. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** There are no safeguarding and corporate parenting implications.

8. CONSULTEES:

- 8.1** Cabinet Member for Environment, Cabinet Member for Public Services & Housing;
Cabinet Member for Community Development, Homesearch Partners

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- 9.1** Housing (Wales) Act 2014, Welsh Government Code of Guidance for the Allocation of Accommodation & Homelessness, April 2015; Allocation of Housing Register Health-Check, January 15 – Andy Gale,

- 10. AUTHOR:** Karen Durrant, Private Sector Housing Manager

- 11. CONTACT DETAILS:** Tel: 01495 742437 E-mail: karendurrant@monmouthshire.gov.uk