

SUBJECT: RURAL ALLOCATIONS POLICY
DIRECTORATE: ENTERPRISE
MEETING: SINGLE CABINET MEMBER
DATE: 14 November, 2018
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to amend the Rural Allocations Policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To consider the need and benefits of a Rural Allocations Policy for rural communities.
- 2.2 To approve changes to the Rural Allocations Policy in order to assist the correct allocation of future affordable housing in rural areas and to align rural areas included in the policy with those of LDP Spatial Strategy. See Appendices.

3. KEY ISSUES:

The policy was originally intended to cover small rural villages where there was little opportunity for households to find affordable housing. Areas such as Llanfoist and the Severnside Settlements were never intended to be included and have had large housing allocations, both in the UDP and the LDP, which have allowed local people in housing need to have access to affordable housing.

The criteria of the policy, as it currently exists, has caused difficulties for the Homeseach Team when allocating rural properties and has resulted in households with no housing need being allocated a property ahead of local households in genuine housing need.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Housing Act 1996 to assess housing need and allocate social housing. S167 of the Act allows persons falling within a particular description to be allocated accommodation, regardless of whether they fall within the 'reasonable preference' categories or not. This includes dealing sensitively with lettings in rural areas to sustain communities by giving priority to those with a local connection to the local area.

4.2 In order to ensure compliance with the legislation there is a need to align the policy with the main Homeseach Common Allocations Policy and it is also considered appropriate to bring the areas considered to be rural in line with those areas in the Local Development Plan. This will ensure that overall, the main Homeseach Allocation Policy will give reasonable preference for allocations to applicants in reasonable preference categories and that the Rural Allocation Policy does not dominate the scheme as required by the regulatory guidance.

4.3 The review will also be used as an opportunity to make the policy criteria clearer both for both local people who are in need of an affordable home and those members of staff undertaking allocations.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

None

**6. WELLBEING AND FUTURE GENERATIONS INPLICATIONS
9INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND
CORPORATE PARENTING:**

It is considered that the proposed changes will impact positively on the Monmouthshire community through ensuring the correct and fair allocation of rural homes. The requested changes will also assist in the sustainability of rural areas by allowing people born and brought up in a community to continue to live there when they have been forced to move out of the community for a short time due to lack of affordable accommodation.

7. CONSULTEES:

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

9. AUTHOR:

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10. CONTACT DETAILS:

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APPENDIX 1

For clarity and ease of scrutiny, the changes to the policy are detailed below:

- 1. There are two changes to settlements to align the policy with the LDP settlement hierarchy:**

Llanfoist Fawr - the village of Llanfoist will no longer be covered by the policy, but Llanellen and Govilon will remain within the policy.

The Severnside settlements of Magor with Undy and Rogiet will no longer be covered by the policy.

- 2. The criterion has been simplified to make allocation fairer and the policy easier to administer.**

Original criterion:

In priority order:

- 1. Applicants who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a continuous period of at least 5 years at the time of application and are owed a reasonable preference as defined by the Housing Act 1996.*
- 2. Applicants who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a continuous period of at least 5 years at the time of application and who need to live in the community in order to provide support to a dependent child or adult or to receive support from a principal carer.*
- 3. Applicants who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a continuous period of at least 5 years at the time of application and who are principally (> 20 hours per week) employed in the community (defined as the Community Council area).*
- 4. Applicants who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a continuous period of at least 5 years at the time of application or those who have lived in the community for a period of five years but have had to move out of the area to access accommodation.*
- 5. Applicants who have previously lived in the community for a period of at least 5 years and who need to move to the community in order to provide support to a dependent child or adult or to receive support from a principal carer.*
- 6. Applicants who have been principally (> 20 hours per week) employed in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a continuous period of at least 5 years.*
- 7. Applicants who have previously lived in the community for a period of at least 5 years.*
- 8. Applicants with a firm offer of employment in the community and who would otherwise be unable to take up the offer because of a lack of affordable housing.*

New criterion:

Priority order: priority will be given, in the first instance, to (s), with (b) and (c) having equal priority.

- (a) Applicants with a housing need who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a period of at least 5 years at the time of application, or in the past.*
- (b) Applicants who need to live in the community in order to provide support to a dependent child or adult or to receive support from a principal carer.*
- (c) Applicants who are principally (>20 hours per week) employed in the community (defined as the Community Council area).*

Applicants will be prioritised using the above criteria and will be shortlisted by housing need accordance with the Monmouthshire County Council Joint Allocations Policy. If more than one applicant has the same priority, the applicant who has lived (or previously lived) in the Community Council area for the longest and will fully occupy the property, will be given priority.

3. A paragraph has been added to exclude households adequately housed in the area from bidding unless they are downsizing.

Households already living in affordable housing and considered to be adequately housed in the community council area where the homes are being built (or the neighbouring community council areas, should cascading out be necessary) will not be eligible to apply unless they are downsizing.

The reason for this change is that adequately housed households with a local connection, who just wanted a new house, were being housed before local people in housing need.

4. Changes have been made to the Evidence of Local Connection paragraph to make it clear what evidence is required and the length of time that an applicant has to provide the evidence. The 7 working day period is considered to be adequate by our partner RSLs. Normal allocations policy allows 5 working days to provide evidence.

5. A list of schemes covered by the policy has been appended to assist the Homeseach Allocations Team.



Affordable Housing

Rural Allocations Policy

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that homes developed for local people are allocated as intended. This policy is to be used in addition to both Monmouthshire County Council's Common Allocations Policy and any other or succeeding allocations policy for letting of affordable housing in Monmouthshire.

The Registered Social Landlord requires assurance for its future business security that the local connection policy will not be allowed to cause empty properties. There is flexibility built into this policy to allow a broadening of both occupancy levels and geographical connection in order to allow properties to be tenanted swiftly and therefore ensure that the affordable housing resource is utilised.

The Rural Allocations Policy will be used to allocate the first 10 homes on all new housing sites and on all subsequent lettings of these properties (once identified via the first round of lettings) in rural areas of Monmouthshire other than:

- The main settlements of Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk (Abergavenny includes the waiting list areas of Mardy, Croesonen and Llanfoist – but not Llanellen and Govilon. The settlement of Monmouth includes the waiting list area of Wyesham)
- The Severnside settlements of Magor, Undy and Rogiet.

Geographical Criteria

The aim of this policy is to ensure that households with strong links to rural areas are given the opportunity to remain in these communities thus helping to maintain sustainability in the future. The local qualification will be based on villages within the Community Council boundary where the properties are located and then will cascade out to the immediately adjoining communities using community council boundaries. (See Appendix 1(a) for a list of the properties covered by this policy).

As there are some rural areas in Monmouthshire where development is unlikely due to land supply and topography, the Council reserves the right to widen qualification to a neighbouring Community Council on occasions where there is a proven local need.

Under Occupation

Priority will be given to applicants who have a local connection and who fully occupy a property in line with local housing allowance size criteria. If there are no applicants meeting that criteria then one spare room may be accepted and two considered according to circumstances. Under occupation by two spare rooms will need to be approved by the Operational Sub Group or nominated by the Local Authority. In the case where there are more applications received that meet the rural housing lettings criteria than there are properties to allocate, these applications will then be assessed to the current Monmouthshire Common Allocations Policy.

Rural Housing Lettings Criteria

Priority order: Priority will be given, in the first instance, to (a), with (b) and (c) having equal priority.

- (a) Applicants with a housing need who have lived in the community (defined as the Community Council area) for a period of at least 5 years at the time of application, or in the past.
- (b) Applicants who need to live in the community in order to provide support to a dependent child or adult or to receive support from a principal carer.
- (c) Applicants who are principally (>20 hours per week) employed in the community (defined as the Community Council area).

Applicants will be prioritised using the above criteria and will be shortlisted by housing need accordance with the Monmouthshire County Council Joint Allocations Policy. If more than one applicant has the same priority, the applicant who has lived (or previously lived) in the Community Council area for the longest and will fully occupy the property, will be given priority.

Households already living in affordable housing and considered to be adequately housed in the community council area where the homes are being built (or the neighbouring community council areas, should cascading out be necessary) will not be eligible to apply unless they are downsizing.

In the event there is no suitable [insert Community Council] applicant, these criteria will then be applied in the same order to applicants from immediately adjoining communities as set out above. Should there be no suitable applicant from the Community Council area where the properties are located or from the immediately adjoining Community Council areas then the properties will be allocated to applicants with a connection to Monmouthshire in line with the Monmouthshire Homesearch Common Allocations Policy.

It should be noted however that the Partnership reserves the right to nominate applicants for rural vacancies, who do not meet the above criteria, where it is

considered that the circumstances of the individual case warrant special consideration. Such cases can only be considered for the offer once the decision has been agreed by the Common Housing Register Operational Sub Group and the Housing and Communities Manager.

Evidence of Local Connection

In all cases, at the request of the Registered Social Landlord, the applicant will be expected to demonstrate their local connection **within 7 working days of an offer being made by the Registered Social Landlord**. If no verifiable evidence has been produced within that time period the applicant will be overlooked and the household next in line will be made an offer. Applicants living at home with parents and looking to leave home for the first time would be expected to provide evidence to show that they have local a local connection. This may include evidence that their parents have achieved the local connection. Suitable supporting evidence – any of the following:

- Bank statements
- Service bills
- Medical registration documents
- Education records

If an applicant does not have any of the above forms of supporting evidence we may accept:

- Letter confirming the necessary local connection from the Clerk on behalf of the Community Council
- Letter confirming the necessary local connection from the Elected Member for the Ward in which the development is located

Applicants not living in the Community, but who are applying for reasons of employment must provide evidence to show that they are principally employed (working > 20 hours) within the area, including the date of commencement of employment and confirmation from their employer of employment status, and whether this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Applicants not living in the Community, but who are applying for reasons of providing support to a dependent child or adult or receiving support from a principal carer must provide evidence such as:

- Social Services care package
- Carer's allowance/attendance allowance
- GP letter

Applicants will also be asked to consent to the landlord making enquiries of the electoral register, council tax records and Experian credit checks should it be necessary to confirm local connection.

An offence may be committed if an applicant knowingly gives false information or knowingly withholds information which has been reasonably requested. An offence is

also committed if the applicant allows a third party to provide false information on his or her behalf, or at his or her instigation.

Where there is suspicion, or an allegation has been made, that a person has either provided false information or has withheld information, the application will be suspended pending the outcome of an investigation. If the outcome of any investigation shows that false information was provided or was deliberately withheld, then the application may be removed from the register and there will be no right to re-register for a period of 12 months. Applicants giving false information may be subject to investigation through the organisation's fraud processes.

Future Voids

The properties identified for each site will remain ear marked for all future lettings. Therefore, all future lettings for these properties will also be carried out as per this policy.

Monitoring

The Council will ensure that lettings through this policy will not dominate the main allocation scheme. The Rural Allocations Policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that overall reasonable preference for allocation in Monmouthshire is given to applicants in the reasonable preference groups.

The policy will also be monitored in order to assess its impact, the outcome of which will be regularly reported.

The policy will also be monitored to ensure that void properties are re-let to qualifying households who satisfy the Rural Allocations Policy.

APPENDIX 2

List of schemes covered by the policy (correct at the time of writing). If unsure whether or not a scheme should be included when allocating, please check with the Strategy & Policy Officer in Monmouthshire County Council's Housing & Communities.

Monmouthshire Housing Association

Bersondy, Llanarth
Tulip Gardens, Llandogo
Southbrook View, Portskewett
St Cadoc's Court, Raglan
Ty Freeman, Gwehelog
Blethyn Close, Mynyddbach, Shirenewton
Mountain Court, Shirenewton

Melin Homes

Nos. 1 – 8 Skirrid Pitch Close, Llanvihangel Crucorney
Nos. 1 – 10 Folly View Close, Goytre (10)
Nos. 1,3,5,6 Roman House, Caerwent
Nos. 27, 37, 38, 39, 43 Ashtree Road, Caerwent
No. 8 Kilpale Close, Caerwent
Nos. 5 -8 Hooper Close, Gilwern (subject to BBNP Policy)
Nos. 11 – 22 Hooper Close, Gilwern (subject to BBNP Policy)

Charter Housing Association

Nos. 1 – 6 Roman Park View, Trellech
Nos. 1 – 6 Kinsey Rise, Broadstone, Trellech
Nos. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10 Harold Close, Trellech