

CABINET

31 July 2020

REVISION OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Report of the Acting Strategic Director for Places

Strategic Aim:	Protecting the vulnerable	
Key Decision: Yes	Forward Plan Reference: FP120620	
Reason for Urgency:	N/A	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Councillor G Brown, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Environment, Property and Finance. Councillor Alan Walters, Portfolio Holder for Safeguarding – Adults, Public Health, Health Commissioning & Community Safety	
Contact Officer(s):	Penny Sharp, Acting Strategic Director – Places	Tel: 01572 722577 psharp@rutland.gov.uk
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Ward Councillors	All	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves for consultation the revised Council's Housing Allocation Policy at Appendix B of the report.
2. Authorises the Acting Strategic Director - Places in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment, Planning, Property, and Finance and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Safeguarding – Adults, Public Health, Health Commissioning & Community Safety to assess any comments made and to finalise the policy.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To propose changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy to take account of the Homelessness Reduction Act and to promote a responsive and efficient service.

2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 The Council's current Housing Allocation Policy (HAP) was produced in April 2016. Since then, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) has come into force. The HAP continues to function quite well as it gives priority to households who are threatened with loss of accommodation within two months, compared with the similar period of 56 days in the HRA.
- 2.2 The Council is moving the allocation system onto the Jigsaw system over the next few months, which is already in use for homelessness case management. This will digitise applications (whereas the current process involves often substantial paper files alongside the existing lettings computer system). As housing register applications have not been reviewed for some time, all applicants will be asked to reapply and to enter their applications onto Jigsaw via the Internet. It is suggested that we take the opportunity to update the HAP so there can be a closer integration operationally between it and the HRA and to make some other clarifications and simplifications. These include the proposed removal of the 50 points of extra priority for people who are seeking rehousing in their own village. Currently, these points have to be added manually (which is the case both with the current system and Jigsaw), have a limited effect and are rarely used. Many village properties already have local lettings agreements giving priority to local people (e.g. rural exception sites).
- 2.3 A critical friend review of the HAP was carried out by the National Practitioner Support Service as part of the transition to Jigsaw. This found that the qualification criteria for joining the housing register were reasonable and that the allocation scheme gave reasonable preference to most groups in need, but that it should be updated to reflect the HRA.

3 THE WAY FORWARD

- 3.1 The proposed revised HAP is in Appendix B. The changes are summarised in Appendix A.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Under section 166A(12) of the Housing Act 1996, if the Council is making an alteration to their housing allocation scheme which reflects a major change of policy, the Council must send the proposed change to every housing association with whom they have nomination rights and provide them with a reasonable opportunity to comment. Paragraph 5.2 of the statutory Code of Guidance states: "A major policy change would include, for example, any amendment affecting the relative priority of a large number of applicants or a significant alteration to procedures."
- 4.2 Section 32 of the Council's existing policy states: "Elected Members are responsible for determining allocation policy and for approving any changes recommended as part of a policy review which would be made following

consultation with tenants, private registered providers, relevant voluntary organisations and other stakeholders.

- 4.3 It is therefore suggested that Cabinet approve Appendix B as a consultation draft for a six week consultation using the website and emails to relevant organisations. It is suggested that approval of the final document be delegated to the Acting Strategic Director – Places, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Planning, Property, and Finance and the Portfolio Holder for Safeguarding – Adults, Public Health, Health Commissioning & Community Safety.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 The HAP could remain unchanged, but the opportunity for it to fit better with the HRA and to simplify the process will have been lost.
- 5.2 More substantial changes to the HAP could have been made, but these are not believed to be necessary and could have added further complication to the HAP.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There was an opportunity to allocate some of the Public Health Reserve against existing salary costs. This released funds that could then be used to purchase the software and the first year's licence at a cost of £31,779. The digitisation of the process will result in saving printing and postage costs.

7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The Council is required to 'have regard to' the statutory code of guidance on homelessness issued by the Secretary of State. Paragraph 2.48 of the Code of Guidance states: "Housing authorities are encouraged to keep under review the impact of their allocations policies upon people at risk of homelessness, including single people who may be less able to establish their residency or may have a history of offending or other behaviour that impacts on their ability to access social housing. It is for the authority to decide its allocation scheme based on local priorities, but in doing so it should be aware of and take into consideration the impact of policies and procedures (which may be unintentional and/or indirect) on applicants who may be at risk of homelessness in the district."
- 7.2 The Council has had regard to the Code of Guidance when producing the revised HAP.

8 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Data Protection will be considered when officers review the results of the Consultation.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening template has been completed. It shows a positive benefit for those groups who fall disproportionately into the priority need groups for homelessness, as well as increasing the help the Council can provide to people outside of those groups.

10 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Efficient operation of the HAP and the HRA will help to reduce the already low incidence of rough sleeping in Rutland. It will also help to provide services for people who are fleeing violence or domestic abuse.

11 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Housing is one of the 'Wider Determinants of Health'. Rented affordable housing is a scarce resource and the revised HAP will allocate it more efficiently and appropriately, complementing the HRA's preventative approach.

12 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 The revised Housing Allocation Policy will complement the Council's implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. It will help to deliver the vision of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 which is, "fair access to suitable and sustainable housing for everyone in Rutland, particularly those whose needs are not readily met through the open market."

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 Critical Friend Allocations Policy Desktop Review – Feedback. Rutland September 2019' by the National Practitioner Support Service.

14 APPENDICES

- 14.1 Appendix A – Summary of proposed changes
14.2 Appendix B – Draft Housing Allocation Policy

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.

Summary of proposed changes

Reference	Change
Front cover tables	Updated to reflect the new document and the passage of time.
Title	Revised date and version number.
Summary of document, Introduction	Reference to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 added.
Footers	Revised date and version number.
Contents	Page numbers revised
3.1, 3.7, 16.5	'Portfolio Holder for Housing' changed to 'relevant Portfolio Holder' due to change in titles.
3.6, 12.3, 19.0 (Homelessness & Insecure/Temporary Accommodation & Lodging with Family or Friends & Social Need), Appendix 2.	Deletion of reference to 'Insecure / Temporary Accommodation' points, which have been replaced by Homelessness points.
3.8, 13.1. 19.0 (Lodging with Family or Friends)	Amended to 56 days due to legislative change.
4.11, 7.4	Amended, as Spire Homes have now been absorbed into Longhurst.
5.1, 6.4	Clarification that households owned the 'prevention' or 'relief' duties may join the housing register.
7.7, 7.10, 19.0 (Employment in Rutland)	Updated sum by Consumer Price Index
7.11, 9.4	Clarification that change of household behaviour may be change of circumstance.
14.3, Appendix 1 (first paragraph)	Clarification of Longhurst policy regarding lettings & age.
16.3	Clarification of section 106 rules for rural exception sites.
19.0 (Homelessness)	Updating of policy to explicitly include 'prevention' and 'relief' duties.
19.0 (Local Connection), Appendix 2	Deletion of category to simplify scheme and because rural exception sites already prioritise many properties for local people.
22.3	Clarification regarding suitable offer and end of duty, due to legislative change.
25.1	Job title changed due to change in structure.
26.4	Amended to make reference to the GDPR.
29.1	CAB now called Citizens Advice Rutland.
Appendix 2, left column	Reworded due to legislative change.
Appendix 2, right column	Clarification of criteria for joining the register.