

**HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
8 FEBRUARY 2023**

HOUSING SERVICES ALLOCATIONS POLICY

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. For Members to consider the draft Housing Services Allocations Policy before approval by Cabinet on 7 March 2023.

Summary

2. The existing Tees Valley Common Housing Allocations Policy has been in place since 2012 and was last updated in 2019. However, due to a number of factors since the Covid pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in demand for Council housing in Darlington, previously reported to this Committee. The existing policy no longer meets the strategic needs for Darlington and so notice has been given on our membership of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership, due to expire in June 2023.
3. A new Housing Services Allocations Policy is therefore required and this is given at **Appendix 1**. Paragraph 9 of the main report sets out the key changes between the existing policy and the new proposed policy.
4. The Tenants Panel has been consulted on the draft policy and the proposals have received overwhelming support.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Members:-
 - (a) Consider the report and draft Housing Services Allocations Policy at Appendix 1 and agree its onward submission to Cabinet.

**Anthony Sandys
Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues**

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Diversity	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All residents on the Council's housing waiting list
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report supports the Council plan to provide high quality Council housing
Efficiency	There are no implications
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. Darlington Borough Council has been part of the sub-regional scheme for allocating social housing since 2009 and a Tees Valley Common Housing Allocations Policy was adopted by the five Local Authorities and their partner housing organisations. The current Allocations Policy has been in place since 2012 and was updated in 2019.
7. However, the existing Allocations policy is no longer fit for purpose. Due to a number of factors since the Covid pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in demand for Council housing in Darlington, previously reported to this Committee in an update to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. As the largest provider of social housing in Darlington, the existing Tees Valley Common Housing Allocations Policy no longer meets the strategic needs for Darlington and some changes are required. As such, and in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health and Housing, notice has been given on our membership of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership, due to expire in June 2023.
8. A new Allocations Policy is therefore required and the proposed policy is given at Appendix 1. A new Allocations IT system is also required, as the contract for the existing system is held by Stockton Borough Council. Preparations for implementing the new IT system are underway, in time for it to go live in June 2023 and the system is being built around the requirements of the new policy.
9. The new Allocations Policy contains many of the features of the existing policy but with the following key changes:

- (a) We have removed all the references to the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership, including data sharing agreements and some processes relating to partner organisations.
- (b) The definition of applicants who would be excluded or suspended from the housing register due to “unacceptable behaviour” has been redefined and strengthened. As well as criminal convictions, anti-social behaviour, as defined by our new Tenancy Agreement, will also exclude applicants from apply for Council Housing. This will also include applicants with Housing debt over £2,000 where no effort is being made to repay that debt.
- (c) We have reviewed the policy to ensure it meets all relevant legislation and Regulator of Social Housing guidance. In particular, we have ensured that the policy meets the Regulator’s consumer standards.
- (d) We have updated the section relating to “giving false information” to ensure that it accurately reflects the current legislation. This includes increasing the level of fine from a £5,000 maximum fine to an unlimited amount.
- (e) We have reviewed and updated the section relating to “reasonable and additional preference” in relation to members of the Armed Forces.
- (f) The policy now includes a section on the application of local lettings policies. Previously this was excluded from the Tees Valley policy and therefore had to be separately agreed.
- (g) We have reviewed and updated the local connections element of the policy, to ensure that it matches with our Housing Management policy. This ensures that priority for Council housing will be given to Darlington residents and those with a local connection to Darlington (for example, where someone has employment within Darlington). Some changes have also been made to the priority banding (see below) to ensure that specific reference is made to Darlington residents.
- (h) We have made a number of changes to the priority banding, as follows:
 - (i) A new band 1+ has been created for people living in Darlington who are losing their home due to demolition or regeneration. These households are currently placed within band 1 of the existing policy and this change will ensure they are given the highest priority for rehousing.
 - (ii) Households in urgent medical need have been moved from band 2 in the existing policy to band 1 in the new policy. “Urgent medical need” has also been redefined as people who are unable to live or remain in their current home due to a medical condition or disability.
 - (iii) A new category has been created for people living in Darlington who are suffering from anti-social behaviour from neighbouring residents, and these applicants will be placed in band 1.
 - (iv) Households in high medical need have been moved from band 3 in the existing policy to band 2 in the new policy. “High medical need” is defined as people

with a medical condition or disability, where a move to alternative accommodation would significantly improve their health.

- (v) A new category has been created for people with learning disabilities, who need to move to receive care and support or, where their current housing is having a detrimental effect on their quality of life and ability to live independently, and these applicants will be included in band 2.
- (vi) A new category has been created for people living in Darlington who are suffering severe financial hardship and need to move to alleviate that hardship, and these applicants will be included in band 2.

Outcome of Consultation

10. The Tenants Panel were consulted in January 2022 and overall, the Panel supported the proposed Housing Allocations Policy.