

Appendix 1

Tees Valley Common Allocations Policy Consultation Summary Report

Background

The Tees Valley Common Allocations Policy was last reviewed a number of years ago. The Tees Valley Lettings Partnership has identified areas within the Common Allocation Policy that need amending to ensure that it is fit for purpose, responsive to housing need across Tees Valley, with consideration to legislation and statutory guidance.

The Tees Valley Lettings Partnership is made up of five local authorities and a number of registered provider partners that either own or manage housing stock across the Tees Valley:

- Darlington Borough Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Middlesbrough Council
- Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Beyond Housing
- Home Group
- North Star

Consultation took place between 3rd June and 12th July 2019 via the Compass website; partner organisations websites; via email to all third sector, voluntary and public sector organisations across Tees Valley; with housing, other relevant staff members and Elected and Board Members; and with residents via local resident forums and on-line panels. The on-line questionnaire was shared across Tees Valley by press teams and through the use of social media.

465 responses were received to the consultation across Tees Valley. 51% of responders were residents. From those who gave their postcodes 31% were Hartlepool residents, 22% Redcar & Cleveland, 18% Stockton, 17% Darlington and 12% from Middlesbrough.

Of the other responders 52% were staff members of the Tees Valley Letting Partnership's current partners. 13 members of staff from Darlington Borough Council responded to the consultation, 7 from Beyond Housing, 6 from Hartlepool Borough Council, 6 from North Star, 4 from Stockton Borough Council, 3 from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and 2 from Middlesbrough Council.

Consultation Summary

The results from the consultation for each proposal are summarised below:

Proposal 1 - Applicants in Low Paid Employment

Current Policy:

The Code of Guidance issued by Communities and Local Government in June 2012 urged local authorities to consider how they could use their allocation policies to support households in low paid employment and contributing to their community. Preference is currently given to applicants in low paid employment, *in addition* to any housing need priority band that they have been awarded.

Reason for Change:

This policy is not currently implemented in Hartlepool so in order to ensure fairness and consistency in applying the allocations policy across all the Partner organisations, applicants in a priority band should compete on their housing need only.

Proposal:

Remove additional preference for people in low paid employment from the policy. In effect, applicants will remain in the same band but not have an additional preference applied.

This change would only affect 0.4% of all applicants.

Results		Summary of comments	Response/ Recommendation
% agree	% disagree		
75.22%	24.78%	The majority of responses in disagreement did not appear to understand the reason for changing this policy and think that people in low paid employment would be overlooked in favour of people in higher paid employment rather than be considered on an equal basis regardless of their employment situation.	Additional preference for people in low paid employment will be removed from the policy in line with the majority of responses. It is currently applied inconsistently, and it is believed that it is fairer to allocate properties regardless of employment status given the socio-economic status of Tees Valley.

		Other responses in disagreement thought retention of this policy would encourage people to seek employment.	
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Proposal 2 - Applicants with More Than One Need

Current Policy:

In Hartlepool, applicants in Bands 1 and 2 with more than one housing need are prioritised on the short-list and given preference for an offer of accommodation over applicants with a single housing need in the same band.

Reason for Change:

In order to ensure fairness and consistency in applying the allocations policy across all partners, applicants in a priority band would in future compete on their housing need only.

Proposal:

It is proposed that applicants in Hartlepool are prioritised consistently with applicants in the other Tees Valley local authority areas (i.e. cumulative need is removed). In future the applicant will remain in the same band but will not have an additional preference applied.

This change would affect less than 0.1% of the waiting list.

Results		Summary of comments	Response/ Recommendation
% agree	% disagree		
86.02%	13.98%	The majority of responses in disagreement thought cumulative need is fairer especially if the applicant has medical needs.	Cumulative need will be removed from the policy in line with the majority of responses.

Proposal 3 - Under-Occupancy

Current Policy:

Additional preference is currently awarded to transferring tenants (of partner landlords) who are under-occupying their homes and who are subject to a cut in housing benefit within Band 1 and Band 2. Band 1 is awarded if the tenant is under-occupying by two or more rooms and Band 2 if this is one room.

Reason for Change:

All partners wish to continue to support their tenants who are under-occupying their property and are financially affected, however we wish to achieve this in a fair and consistent manner.

Proposal:

Whilst different bandings will continue to be awarded to tenants (of partner landlords), depending on the number of bedrooms they are under-occupying, the additional preference will no longer be applied.

This change would affect just 0.9% of current applicants.

Results		Summary of comments	Response/ Recommendation
% agree	% disagree		
85.22%	14.78%	The majority of responses in disagreement did not appear to understand that people who are under occupying will still receive priority on the scheme.	Additional preference for people who are under occupying will be removed from the policy in line with the majority of responses. Priority will continue to be awarded to partner landlord tenants who are under occupying.

Proposal 4 - Overcrowding

Current Policy:

Our current policy gives two different levels of priority to applicants who are overcrowded; Band 2 for those who are 3 or more bed spaces short of requirements; Band 3 for those who are 1-2 bed spaces short of requirements.

Reason for Change:

In order to ensure fairness and consistency in applying the allocations policy, all applicants who are overcrowded should be awarded an equal priority.

Proposal:

Priority for tenants who are overcrowded in their current accommodation should be awarded to all applicants, regardless of the number of bedrooms.

Results		Summary of comments	Response/ Recommendation
% agree	% disagree		
85.83%	14.17%	The majority of responses in disagreement to creating just one category for overcrowding commented that households who are severely overcrowded should have more priority.	All applicants who are overcrowded will be awarded an equal priority in line with the majority of responses.

Proposal 5 - Reasonable Offers of Accommodation

Current Policy:

A 'one reasonable offer of accommodation' policy has been adopted by all Tees Valley Lettings Partners, except Hartlepool Borough Council where applicants can receive up to three reasonable offers of accommodation before their priority is reviewed. A refusal of this offer can be accepted if the offer is deemed unsuitable for the applicant.

Reason for Change:

Just 4.3% of applicants on the waiting list are eligible for three offers under the current policy. Reducing the amount of offers from three to one in Hartlepool will effectively mean that all successful applicants are treated fairly and consistently.

Proposal:

Hartlepool Borough Council to remove the three reasonable offers of accommodation. All partners should work towards a one reasonable offer of accommodation policy.

Results		Summary of comments	Response/ Recommendation
% agree	% disagree		
77.18%	22.82%	The majority of responses in disagreement believe that giving one offer of accommodation takes away choice for applicants.	A one offer policy will be applied in Hartlepool as well as the other local authority areas in line with the majority of responses. The procedures and updated policy will make the criteria clear

			for determining a reasonable offer of accommodation and an unreasonable refusal of that offer.
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Proposal 6 - Applicants' Behaviour

Current Policy:

An applicant (or members of their household) with a history of less-serious unacceptable behaviour (i.e. housing debt of under £1,500 or mid-low-level behaviour issues), can register on the scheme and bid on advertised properties. However, until a positive change in behaviour can be demonstrated (i.e. they have complied with a repayment plan for debts or have modified their behaviour) they will be considered *after* applicants with a record of good behaviour (in the same band). This is called reduced preference and is often referred to as 'overlooking'.

Reason for Change:

The process of reduced preference ('overlooking') is confusing for applicants.

Proposal:

To ensure clarity, it is proposed that applicants who would otherwise be 'overlooked' will now have their application suspended from bidding until they have complied with a repayment plan for debts or have modified their behaviour. Applicants who have been suspended will be notified of the decision and the reasons for this decision will be given in writing. An applicant will be able to request a review of the decision to 'suspend' their application.

Each case will be considered on an individual basis and exceptional circumstances will be considered.

Results		Summary of comments	Response/ Recommendation
% agree	% disagree		
92.35%	7.65%	Most of responses in disagreement to this change in policy have asked for more clarity on how decisions will be made and what constitutes modified behaviour.	There is overwhelming support for moving away from reduced preference to suspension, so this will be adopted. The procedures will be clear about the decision-making process and criteria that will be adopted.

			Each case will be considered on an individual basis and exceptional circumstances will be considered.
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Proposal 7 - Housing Need Banding

Current Policy:

In line with legislation, specific housing needs must be included within our lettings scheme. Once assessed, applicants are awarded a “band” relevant to their housing needs. Each band represents differing housing need criteria.

Reason for Change:

The current five-tiered banding structure has been reviewed to recognise changes in legislation with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It has also been simplified to reflect changes in housing need across Tees Valley.

Proposal:

To simplify the current banding structure as follows:

Band 1+ will be removed and incorporated into Band 1

Band 1 will become Band 2 (except for statutory homeless and people owed the prevention or relief duty who will remain in Band 1)

Band 2 will become Band 3

Band 3 will be incorporated into the new Band 3

Band 4 will have no changes

Results		Summary of comments	Response/ Recommendation
Do you agree with the proposed change from Band 1+ to the Urgent Housing Needs Band?			
% agree	% disagree		
92.04%	7.96%		
Do you agree with the proposed change from Band 1 to the High Housing Needs Band?			
% agree	% disagree		
87.16%	12.84%		
Do you agree with the proposed change from Band 2 to the Medium Housing Needs Band?			
% agree	% disagree		
88.45%	11.55%		

Do you agree with the proposed change to absorb Band 3 into the Medium Housing Needs Band?			
% agree	% disagree		
92.79%	7.21%		
		<p>The banding changes are supported. However, there were comments that people suffering domestic abuse and leaving armed forces should be prioritised in the highest band and that prison leavers should not receive this priority. High medical needs should also be in the highest band. There were a few comments that the proposed changes are unfair and there was no need to change as this is now confusing. There was a suggestion that the bands should be re-titled so that people don't think they have been "demoted".</p>	<p>As a result of the consultation it is recommended that Domestic Abuse cases and HM Forces will be removed from the High Housing Needs band and dealt with in Urgent Housing Needs under homelessness legislation.</p> <p>The policy will provide clarity that applicants have not been "demoted" as a result of the changes in banding criteria.</p> <p>In relation to urgent medical needs this will remain in the high housing needs band as proposed. Applicants who are bed blocking in hospital or accepted as homeless will be prioritised as in Urgent Housing Need under homelessness legislation.</p>

Recommendations

Each proposal was supported by the majority of responders through the public consultation and it is recommended that the Tees Valley Allocations Policy is amended with these changes.

In addition, as a result of the feedback received, concerns relating to the need for guidance on reasonable offers, modified behaviour and length of time in a

band will be considered in the development of the new procedures and will be addressed accordingly.

The criteria within the High Housing Needs band for applicants suffering domestic abuse or leaving HM Forces has been reconsidered and will be removed from this priority and dealt with under homelessness legislation as part of the Urgent Housing Needs band.

The proposed new banding structure is as follows:

Urgent Housing Needs (Band 1)

- People losing their home due to a recognised regeneration scheme within any one of the local authorities within the sub region
- People assessed as statutory homeless and in priority need
- People who are owed the homeless prevention or relief duty

High Housing Needs (Band 2)

- Urgent Medical
- Ready for independent living
- Care Leaver/child in need
- Adoptive parents/foster carers
- Unsafe/insanitary housing conditions
- Under Occupation (2 rooms)

Medium Housing Needs (Band 3)

- High medical
- Overcrowding
- Under Occupation (1 room)
- Hardship
- Sharing Facilities

Low Housing Need (Band 4)

- People who are adequately housed; or
- Refused a reasonable offer of accommodation or worsened own circumstances