

MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

Equality Impact Assessment

Title of Policy/Service/Contract: Revisions to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme

Division: Housing, Environmental Health and Building Control

Lead Officer: Julian Till, Housing Needs Manager

Date Assessment completed: February 2016

1. SCOPING

1.1 Aims of the service:

The Council's Housing Allocation Scheme seeks to provide a fair and transparent way of allocating affordable housing to those in housing need who are on the Mid Sussex Common Housing Register through a process of Choice-Based Lettings.

A revised Housing Allocation Scheme was adopted with effect from 1 January 2015. Implementation of the revised scheme and the introduction of Government Guidance regarding the Right to Move have brought to light the need for a number of further revisions. The Right to Move requires councils to assist social housing tenants relocating to take up work or apprenticeship opportunities, for example by exempting them from having to meet local connection criteria. Statutory guidance encourages every council to set aside a small proportion (minimum 1%) of lets for such tenants.

The proposed revisions to the Allocation scheme are shown below:

1. Providing false information

Add new non-qualifying category for applicants who provide false information and may be removed from the register indefinitely as a result.

2. The Right to Move

Exempt applicants who exercise their Right to Move (introduced by the Government from April 2015) from having to meet our local connection criteria in order to qualify to join the housing register. In response to guidance, set annual maximum 1% quota of allocations to those exercising their Right to Move amounting to around 3 or 4 properties a year.

3. Transfer Applicants under-occupying accommodation

No longer allow transfer applicants who are under-occupying their home and have been placed in Band A to bid for properties that are larger than they need.

4. Transfer Applications under-occupying accommodation

Remove requirement that any 3 or 4 bed house released by a transfer applicant who is under-occupying should be prioritised for other transfer applicants.

5. Allocation of ground floor or lift-access accommodation

Amend the way bids on ground floor (or lift-access) properties are prioritised so as to remove priority given to transfer applicants who are under-occupying and give Mobility 3 applicants in Band C the same priority as other Band C applicants. Such properties account for 47% of lettings of flats and bungalows. It is felt to be fairer on other Band C applicants if priority is based on Priority Date alone, once bids from those in Band A or B in any Mobility Group and those in band C in Mobility Groups 1 & 2 have been considered.

The revised scheme will be considered by the Scrutiny Committee for Leisure and Community on 2 March and Full Council on 23 March. Should Council give its approval, the new scheme will be implemented from April 2016.

1.2 Who the service affects and the main customers (internal or external)

The people affected by the proposed changes are those in housing need who are currently on the Common Housing Register and those who may seek to join it in the future. People affected are likely to be on low to modest incomes and disproportionately will be people who are vulnerable and have housing related support needs.

Revisions to the schemes will have implications for housing associations that rely on the Council to provide nominations to their vacant tenancies and for organisations that provide supported housing, or who provide housing related support and/or housing advice to vulnerable people in housing need.

1.3 What equality information is available, including any evidence from engagement and analysis of use of services?

The Register contains information about each applicant's ethnicity, gender, age, income, need for adapted accommodation and whether they have a support need. We are able to analyse bidding patterns by age and other vulnerability and to identify those who will be affected by the proposed changes to the scheme.

1.4 What does the information tell us about the equality issues associated with the service and implications for the protected groups?

An analysis has been undertaken of lettings in relation to the characteristics of those on the Register. This shows that lettings in relations to ethnicity are broadly consistent with the composition of those on the Register. Detailed information including factors such as disability and age are included in section 2.3.

1.5 Are contractors or partnerships used to deliver the service?

The Council is a member of the Sussex Homemove Scheme, which is a partnership of 11 authorities in East and West Sussex that operates Choice-Based Letting. Administration of the Common Housing Register is contracted to Affinity Sutton and provided by their Homemove Team. The changes to the allocation scheme do not have any direct procurement implications.

2. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT: ANALYSIS AND ACTION PLANNING

2.1 Current measures taken by the service to address issues of the protected groups

In assessing issues associated with the protected groups, people on the Housing Register are likely to be on low incomes. Around 21% of those on the Register are flagged as being vulnerable. This includes:

- 6.0% mental health problems
- 5.6% older people
- 3.5% physical disabilities
- 2.1% with learning difficulties
- 1.1% domestic violence/harassment/ASB
- 0.9% drug or alcohol problems
- 0.7% ex-offenders

The protected groups and other characteristics most affected by the proposed changes are:

- Disability
- Age

Current measures to provide for these groups include:

- Assisted bidding, where bids for properties are made on behalf of vulnerable applicants by the Affinity Sutton Homemove Team and Council Housing Needs Team.
- The existing allocation scheme and Choice-Based lettings process is designed to match suitably designed and adapted properties with people with mobility problems.
- Supported housing is allocated by multi-agency panels to ensure that vulnerable people are supported in finding accommodation that is right for them.

For the following remaining protected groups, no specific issues have been identified from the proposed changes to the Allocation Scheme:

- Ethnicity
- Low income or skill level
- Living in rural areas.
- The needs of faith groups and faith issues
- The needs of men and women
- The needs of gay men, lesbians, bisexual and heterosexual people
- The needs of transgender people
- Issues arising from pregnancy and maternity
- Issues arising from marriage and civil partnership.

2.2 Consultation on the proposed changes

The proposed changes to the allocation scheme have been raised with the Council's Registered Provider partners of the Common Housing Register. Also with supported housing providers and those organisations which provide advice to those in housing need.

2.3 Issues arising from the proposed changes to the Allocation Scheme and how they are to be addressed

The proposed changes that may have a differential impact on the protected groups are those relating to:

- Amendment 3: transfer applicants under-occupying accommodation
- Amendment 5: allocation of ground floor and lift-access accommodation

Amendment 3: transfer applicants under-occupying accommodation

The current Scheme prioritises existing social tenants who are living in Mid Sussex and are under-occupying their home and who have expressed a wish to downsize to a smaller property. This is done by placing them in Band A, the highest band, on the basis that assisting these tenants to move makes best use of scarce available housing. Under the current Scheme, such applicants are allowed to bid for smaller properties that are still larger than their needs. For example, this allows a single person who is currently under-occupying a 3 bedroom house to bid for a 2 bedroom house even though a 1 bedroom dwelling would be large enough for their needs. Whilst it is important to encourage tenants who may be under-occupying their homes to downsize, it is felt that the current arrangement does not make best use of the increasingly scarce housing available and that, in

future, such applicants should no longer be allowed to bid on homes that are larger than their needs.

There are currently 12 out of the 23 applicants in band A, who are transfer applicants under-occupying their existing property. 7 of these are 60 or over, of which 4 have a vulnerability. It is not judged that this proposal will have a significant impact from an equality perspective, in disqualifying applicants from bidding for properties that are larger than their needs. 6 of the 12 applicants in Band A have never made a bid for a vacant property under the current scheme. The revised scheme will make an exception for those entitled to bid for sheltered/retirement housing, who will continue to be allowed to bid for any 2 bedroom units in such accommodation, as and when these occasionally become available.

Amendment 5: allocation of ground floor or lift-access accommodation

The current Scheme sets out special rules that are used to prioritise bids on flats and bungalows that are on the ground floor or have lift-access. The revised Scheme alters these priorities in the light of experience and with a view to providing a fairer way of prioritising such accommodation. Based on analysis of lettings for the period April 2014 to December 2015 lettings of such homes account for 47% (149) of lettings of general needs flats and bungalows, of which 67% are of 1 bed units, and so the way these are prioritised can have an important effect on which applicants are selected for a high percentage of lettings.

Priority is currently given to bids from applicants who have a mobility issue on the basis that such accommodation is suited to them because of accessibility and this priority has resulted in 34% (51) of such properties being let to those with mobility needs.

Applicants with mobility issues are divided into three Mobility Groups as follows:

- Mobility Group 1 Full-time wheelchair user
- Mobility Group 2 Part-time wheelchair user
- Mobility Group 3 Person with limited mobility who can manage 3 steps

Breakdown of 149 lettings to general needs, ground floor or lift-access accommodation:

Period April 2014 to December 2015 Lettings of general needs or ground floor lift-access accommodation	Total 149	Band of successful applicants			
		A	B	C	D
Number which went to applicants in a Mobility Group	51	6	6	33	6
Who were in Mobility Group					
Mob 1	2	1	1	-	-
Mob 2	5	1	1	2	1
Mob 3	44	4	4	31	5

In the revised Scheme it is proposed to retain priority for bids from applicants in band A and band B who are in any Mobility Group. Priority would then be given to bids from applicants who are in band C who are in Mobility Groups 1 or 2. Priority would then move on to bids from other applicants, prioritising first by band and then by Priority Date, which is the date an applicant enters a particular band. The effect of this alteration would be that bids from applicants in band C who are in Mobility Group 3 would no longer be given the additional priority they are currently given, but would instead be prioritised in the same way as other applicants in band C, including those applicants who have been accepted as homeless by the Council and who are waiting in temporary accommodation. Under the current arrangement, Mobility 3 applicants are given priority for these homes immediately on entering band C and jump over the heads of others who may have been waiting some time. Under the revised arrangements, these applicants will gradually rise up band C as their Priority Date

ages and so they will still have a reasonable opportunity to access such units if they need them. They may have to wait longer, however, than they currently do.

The table below provides information regarding the numbers currently on the Register and in a Mobility Group, together with their band.

Register breakdown at February 2016	Total	Band Breakdown			
		A	B	C	D
Totals in a Mobility Group	149	12	9	56	72
Who were in Mobility Group					
Mob 1	10	1	0	4	5
Mob 2	37	8	3	12	14
Mob 3	102	3	6	40	53

Analysis of lettings April 2014 to December 2015 shows that there were 31 Mobility 3 applicants in Band C, who would have been potentially disadvantaged by this change. The table above shows that there are currently 40 Mobility 3 applicants in Band C (of 312 in total on the Register in Band C).

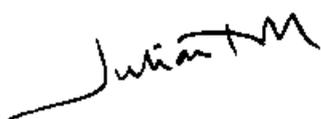
Although this proposed revision removes the current advantage that is given to bids from Mobility 3 applicants for ground floor or lift-access properties, it is felt that the revised arrangements do not significantly disadvantage such applicants. They do, however, give other applicants who may have been waiting for some time in unsatisfactory housing, some of whom may have mental health or other disabilities, an equal opportunity to access what is a significant proportion of lettings, representing some 47% of those to general needs flats and bungalows. Band C includes people who are owed a full homelessness duty and are living in temporary accommodation, where it is clearly desirable to minimise the amount of time spent in such accommodation:

The implementation of the allocation scheme is regularly monitored, and this will enable us to keep the impact of all of these changes under review.

2.4 Action Plan

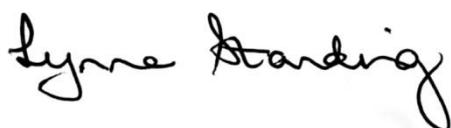
The Action Plan below is intended to demonstrate how the issues identified in this assessment are being addressed:

Action	Lead Officer	Timescale
Further review of the operation of the revised allocation scheme following a year of operation.	Julian Till	April 2017



Date: 22/2/16

Julian Till Housing Needs Manager



Date: 22/2/16

Lynne Standing Head of Housing, Environmental Health and Building Control