

Report for: Housing, Planning and Development
Scrutiny Panel – 6 March 2025

Title: Housing Allocations Policy

Report authorised by: Director of Placemaking and Housing

Lead Officer: Assistant Director for Housing

Ward(s) affected: All

1 Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 This report sets out the background to the development of a new housing allocations policy, sets out the requirements for and process for consultation and covers the main principles of Haringey's new draft housing allocations policy. It also includes the draft housing allocations policy as an appendix, alongside the policy's EQIA.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny panel considers the report and its appendices and makes any recommendations with regard to the draft housing allocations policy.

3 Background

Housing Allocation Policies

- 3.1 Local authorities are required to set out how households on their housing register are prioritised for social housing in the area. The Council's policy is set out in its Housing Allocations Policy, the current version of which was adopted in 2014 and last amended in 2021.
- 3.2 There are over 13,000 households on Haringey's housing register. Households on the housing register are eligible for social housing in the borough. This could be either the council's social housing or housing owned or managed by other registered providers to which the council has nomination rights. Every year, homes become available for those households through either the relet of an existing social home that a tenant has moved out of, or through a newly built social home being ready for its first tenant.
- 3.3 There are far fewer homes available for first-let or re-let than there are households on the register. Therefore, a housing allocations policy sets out the rules for the prioritisation of these homes. It also sets out what homes a household is eligible for, the mechanism for allocating these homes and the implication for households of refusing an offer.

- 3.4 Haringey's current allocations policy uses a banding system to assess the urgency of a household's need to move to a new social rented home. There are three bands. Households in band A have the highest priority for new homes, band B the next priority and then band C. Within a band, priority is determined by the date at which the application to join the housing register was made.
- 3.5 In order to ensure that social housing in Haringey is allocated as fairly as possible, and in the best interests of the borough, and given that the council's allocations policy has not been fully reviewed for a decade, work to develop a new housing allocations policy has been underway.

Process for a new AP

- 3.6 The process for developing a new housing allocations policy includes the following stages:
- Engagement with internal and external stakeholders, partners, and residents
 - Development of a draft housing allocations policy, to be agreed by Cabinet
 - Formal consultation on the draft housing allocations policy
 - Consideration of the consultation responses
 - Preparation of final housing allocations policy, to be agreed by Cabinet
- 3.7 Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel are asked to comment on the draft Housing Allocations Policy, following its agreement for consultation by Cabinet at its meeting in January 2025.

Engagement to inform a new Housing Allocations Policy

- 3.8 Work to develop a new housing allocations policy included extensive engagement with residents and with other stakeholders. Resident engagement was conducted through a series of 1-1 conversations and a focus group with a group of residents who were representative of the overall make-up of the housing register. The focus group ensured that residents needed to think about the best housing allocations policy for all the borough's residents in housing need in the round, and consider the many trade-offs at play.
- 3.9 The main themes that emerged through this engagement included the need to ensure that the allocations policy met the needs of the borough's children; the importance of allocating homes based on need; and the need to ensure that the allocations process is clear and transparent.

The draft housing allocations policy

- 3.10 The draft housing allocations policy was agreed by Cabinet in January 2025. It was designed to respond to a number of key principles. Any substantive policy change will be subject to consultation.
- 3.11 The draft housing allocations policy also included some changed language to help it to be clearer. These do not amount to substantive policy changes. The changes are as follows:

- Effective Date to be called “Priority Date” (this is the date used to prioritise applicants in the same band)
- Band A to be called “Urgent Priority”
- Band B to be renamed “High Priority” and split into “High Priority (dependents only)” and then “High Priority (others)”
- Band C to become “Standard Priority”

Key principle 1: Higher priority for younger families

- 3.12 There are a number of policy changes to respond to the need to better serve the borough’s children, and also to support vulnerable adults. The current policy awards priority based on housing need and waiting time but gives the same priority for those with young children as it does to those with adult children. There was a very strong view from residents we engaged with that the Allocations Policy should do more to support families with young children.
- 3.13 The draft housing allocations policy included a number of changes to support this.
- 3.14 It is proposed that within Band B / Urgent Priority Band, households with children under 22 are prioritised over households that include adult children – that is to say, children who are of an age where they could live independently. For the purposes of the draft housing allocations policy, the language of ‘dependent children’ – i.e. children 22 or under – and ‘non-dependent children’ – i.e. children aged over 22 – is used.
- 3.15 Around half of Council homes are let to those in the current Band B, most of which are homeless households currently living in temporary accommodation. Many of the larger families are comprised of the applicant (& their partner) and dependent children (only). The proposal is to give these families higher priority over to those who have ‘non-dependent’ – or adult - children living with them.
- 3.16 This policy change reflects the outcome of workshops with applicants on priorities in the new policy and from discussions with children’s services; to the effect that the Council should generally choose to give a home of any given size to a household that needs the bedroom space for dependent children, rather than adult children.
- 3.17 It is proposed to achieve this by splitting the old Band B into two sub-bands – one for applicants whose households include the main applicant (and their partner) and is otherwise only comprised of ‘dependents’ (which will generally mean children under a certain age but also includes adults who receive or give significant care) and one with other households including those with non-dependents.
- 3.18 Households with a mix of dependents and non-dependents will only qualify for the higher band if the non-dependent can share with a dependent – that is, if the non-dependent does not increase the property size they need.
- 3.19 For this purpose, an adult child is defined as one who is over the age of 22, though this is subject to consultation. Adults may be included as dependents if they receive (or provide) significant care which could not be provided if they did not live in the same home.

- 3.20 Single people and couple-only households will also come under the 'others' priority band. However, the lower sub-band will have little practical effect on single person/couple as they will usually only be entitled to a single bedroom and hence will not usually be competing with dependent-only households.

Proposals to reduce demand for larger homes

- 3.21 A number of proposals have been put forward to reduce demand for larger homes. This would mean that these larger homes would be able to be used for those who have a greater need for them.
- 3.22 The first proposal to enable is to remove the age limit on same-sex adults sharing a room. The current policy allocates individual bedrooms for anyone that is 25 or older. This means that the majority of those waiting for larger family homes are multi-adult households.
- 3.23 The proposal is to mandate that same-sex adults or children should continue to share rooms, subject to a maximum age difference of 25 years between them. Medical award for a separate room can be awarded where there is a medical need as currently applies to younger household members.
- 3.24 This change will roughly halve the number of applicants waiting for homes with five or more bedrooms, increasing the proportion let to those with large families with dependents.
- 3.25 Currently applicants can include their siblings, parents, grand-parents and grand-children. The second proposal to reduce demand for larger homes is to continue to allow these to be included on new applications but only when they have lived with the family for at least one year at the time the offer is made.
- 3.26 Thirdly, it is also proposed that any adult children of the applicant who have their own children or a partner living with them will be deemed to be a new household and so will instead need to make their own application. Removing these would mean removing grandchildren or grandparents unless they were giving or receiving care which could not be provided from another home.

Proposal to free up existing larger homes

- 3.27 It is proposed that anyone under-occupying a social tenancy will have their Priority Date set as the date their tenancy started. This will increase their priority meaning they have more choice on their new home and thus are more likely to move.
- 3.28 It is proposed that anyone occupying an adapted home (and who no longer needs those adaptations) will have their Priority Date set as the date their tenancy started. This will increase their priority meaning they have more choice on their new home and thus are more likely to move.

Key principle 2: allocating homes to those who need them

- 3.29 A number of changes are proposed to ensure that homes are allocated swiftly and fairly to those who need them.

- 3.30 This includes a proposal to commence 'auto-bidding' for anyone with Urgent Priority (the old Band A) or either of the High Priorities (the old Band B) if the applicant has not bid that week. Sometimes, high priority applicants do not bid for homes and so are not getting the move they need. The Council is proposing to change the policy so that anyone entitled to bid can continue to do so but that the Council can make an automatic bid for properties if they fail to do so. This system is called auto-bidding and will automatically apply to anyone living in temporary accommodation and may, with the Council's discretion, be applied to those who have had Urgent Priority.
- 3.31 This will ensure those at the top of the list will get allocated homes when they reach the top of the waiting list. For Urgent Priority the auto-bidding will not be applied until an applicant has had Urgent Priority for at least six months.
- 3.32 The current policy only offers one offer of accommodation in many areas. It is proposed to make this clear where this applies and to ensure that those who refuse homes have their priority reduced and so make sure that homes go to those who need and want them. Second offers will be made only where the Exceptional Rehousing Decisions Panel agrees there are exceptional circumstances.
- 3.33 Currently properties allocated through Choice Based Lettings are offered to the highest applicant who bids. This has allowed applicants in temporary accommodation to be offered homes if there are no bidders in a higher band. However, if auto-bidding is introduced as above, all homes will be allocated to Urgent Priority households until the current backlog has been cleared. To address this, it is proposed that the Annual Lettings Plan sets a proportion that are reserved for those in the Urgent Priority Band and/or those living in temporary accommodation.

Changes relating to medical need

- 3.34 Currently the policy is unclear about the priority given for over-crowding and medical issues caused by over-crowding. The policy clarifies this position, including that this is tenure blind and awarded if alternative suitable accommodation is not available. For those who are not already social tenants, this alternative accommodation may include an offer of temporary accommodation or a private sector tenancy.
- 3.35 The council is proposing to prioritise homes with gardens to those who have a medical need for one. Currently there is no prioritisation for these so these may go to households who do not need them and so increase the waiting time for those who do.

Increasing transparency

- 3.36 Currently there are multiple panels which can award tenancies or amend offers. These powers are being consolidated into one panel to increase transparency. The Panel's Terms of Reference and membership will be publicly available alongside the final Allocations Policy when approved.

- 3.37 The allocations policy includes the possibility to set aside a number of lets allocated annually to specific groups. It is proposed that these quotas are named in the policy, but that the numbers set aside for each quota is set each year by the Annual Lettings Plan. Clarifying this process will increase transparency and enable the quota levels to be adapted to changing circumstances. It is also proposed that the Annual Lettings Plan has the power to reserve a proportion of the annual lets for households with Urgent Priority (with dependents) or a lower priority.

Income and savings

- 3.38 The maximum income and savings levels are proposed to be updated. The income levels are proposed to be updated to the minimum income level that would allow a household to rent a home at London Living Rent (an intermediate rent) level. The savings levels are proposed to be updated to bring them in line with the savings levels for universal credit eligibility.

Changes to the Neighbourhood Moves Scheme

- 3.39 The Neighbourhood Moves Scheme allows existing council tenants living near newly built council homes priority for those homes. The draft allocations policy is proposing to consult on certain changes to the Neighbourhood Moves Scheme, including ending the Neighbourhood Moves Scheme, amending the scheme to allow all under-occupying households in the borough first priority, extending the scheme to tenants of housing associations, and ending the possibility of tenants with no housing need from moving to a newly built home.

4 Appendices

Appendix 1: draft Housing Allocations Policy, for consultation

Appendix 2: Equalities Impact Assessment