

## **Wiltshire Council's New Allocation Policy (To be implemented during Summer 2014)**

### **Area Board Briefing**

The Housing Act 1996 Part VI (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Localism Act 2012) requires the Council to have a scheme which determines how allocations and nominations will be made. In Wiltshire we operate a Choice Based Lettings policy called Homes4Wiltshire which was adopted shortly before unitary.

The purpose of the Council's Choice Based Lettings Policy is to set out clear guidelines to ensure that affordable housing is allocated fairly and according to applicants' need for housing while at the same time taking into account effective management of the affordable housing stock across Wiltshire.

There is a high demand for affordable homes in Wiltshire, and across the UK in general. At the current time, over 19,000 households are registered for re-housing with the numbers growing daily. Demand will always outweigh supply so the Council needs to ensure that those with the greatest need are prioritised for re-housing.

The Council receives around 2,000 nominations a year. The majority of applicants on the Housing Register therefore will not be nominated or referred for a vacancy. It is important therefore that our policy is able to clearly identify those in the greatest housing need and minimises the level of time taken to assess applicants that are not going to receive active consideration for vacancies. This will free up time for the Council to offer a more comprehensive housing advice and options service to help applicants find housing.

Housing is allocated according to the Council's Allocations Policy which represents the fairest and most transparent way for the Authority to decide who should be prioritised. The Localism Act in 2011 introduced new freedoms for local authorities to decide to whom and how properties should be allocated and Wiltshire Council has used this opportunity to review its policy and make important changes that residents have advised us that they want to see. The review was far reaching and took into account the views of elected members, residents, area boards and the landlords and partners that we work with. Our new policy, which will be implemented during Autumn 2014, is substantially different from the current way we allocate our homes.

What came out from our review was primarily that:

- People wanted to see local homes go to local people.
- People wanted honesty in being able to manage the expectations of what people can expect in terms of their housing options.
- We should make the best use of the housing stock available due to the high demands
- It should reward those who have demonstrated that they will make good tenants.

This will be done by:

- Giving priority to those with a local connection – Local homes for local people
- Changes to the banding system

- Adopting the national bedroom standard
- Introducing qualifying persons criteria

### **Giving priority to those with a local connection – Local homes for local people**

If an applicant does not meet the connection criteria to live in the Wiltshire Council area they will not qualify to register. An applicant's individual circumstances will be considered when deciding if they meet the connection requirement to live in Wiltshire, and will comply with any appropriate statutory guidance by using a local connection exclusion group. This group will include amongst other things the statutory guidance regarding members of the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces, statutory homeless and those fleeing from violence.

The majority of vacant homes will now be matched to applicants with a strong local connection within an adopted neighbourhood plan area or the town or parish, based on the following criteria:-

- A person who is resident in that area. The residency will need to be permanent and have lived in the area 6 months out of the last 12 or 3 years out of the last 5, or
- A person who is in permanent paid employment or has a fixed term contract for a minimum of one year or permanent offer of paid employment in the area, or is self employed and works predominately in the area or
- A person with close family (grand-parents, parents, legal guardian, adult children or brothers and sisters) who have lived in the parish or town for 5 years or longer.

Once local connection has been confirmed we will allocate to the applicant in the highest band with the longest effective date, which is the date of application.

### **Changes to the Banding System**

The banding system has changed and we have simplified the structure to ensure social housing is accessible to those most in need. Applicants will, however, still have their housing need assessed in the same way and be banded according to their assessed need to move.

Band 1 (urgent need)	Statutory requirement Move on Urgent medical or welfare need
Band 2 (high need)	Under occupying and suffering financial hardship Social care
Band 3 (medium need)	No fixed abode Temporary accommodation Supported accommodation Seriously overcrowded Medical and welfare need Under occupying in social housing Other statutory requirements
Band 4 (low need)	Lacking or sharing facilities Overcrowded Armed forces & reserve forces Intentionally homeless Sheltered or extra care
<b>Eligible to bid on selected properties ONLY</b>	
Open Market Register	Low Cost Home Ownership Home Buy Shared Ownership

	Market rented properties Older people accommodation Specialist accommodation for those with specific needs
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### **Adopting the national bedroom standard**

When deciding the size of property for which applicants are eligible the Government's bedroom standard will now be used. This means that houses will be allocated strictly according to household size to ensure every allocation is made to best effect and to counter the imposition of the "bedroom tax". It will bring the policy in line with housing benefit rules and housing in the private sector.

### **Introducing "qualifying persons" criteria**

The Localism Act in 2011 gave local authorities the freedom to determine who should and shouldn't qualify for social housing. The Council, through its review, has chosen to exclude the following:

- Unacceptable behaviour – those who have caused unacceptable behaviour enough to make them unsuitable as a prospective tenant, including those with rent arrears and those who have caused anti social behaviour
- Local connection – those who do not meet the connection criteria to live in the Wiltshire council area
- Financial resource limit – those who have assets or income above the financial resource limit and could resolve their own housing needs themselves
- No identified housing need – those who are already adequately housed
- Housed within the last 12 months – those who have moved into social housing within the last 12 months
- Those who have deliberately worsened their circumstances - those whose own actions have made their housing worse.

The new criteria means that there will be a greater onus on people taking responsibility for their actions.

Everyone currently registered for housing with Homes 4 Wiltshire will be contacted and moved onto the new scheme in a transition process over the Spring/Summer 2014 period and need to do nothing at the current time.

For further information please contact Nicole Smith, Head of Strategic Housing.

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