

Review of Wiltshire Council's Housing Allocation Policy

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.

The Council holds a Housing Register of those wanting to be considered for affordable housing from which nominations are made. There were 17,088 applicants on the Housing Register at 1 April 2012, of which 7,626 had no identified housing need and would be considered as households who have a desire to move, but are currently suitably housed. We also have 5,174 who were identified as having a low need for re-housing, with only 213 households in our highest band. The Housing Register allows households to be considered for properties owned by over 32 housing providers. We would always encourage all housing providers to include all their properties in the Choice Based Lettings scheme whether they are subject to nomination rights or not.

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.

Our allocations policy has 5 bands which are Platinum, Gold plus, Gold, Silver and Bronze. Applicants with the highest level of need are placed into Platinum and applicants with no housing need are placed into the bronze band.

Following the introduction of the Localism Act we now have the opportunity to review our allocations policy to consider some of the new freedoms that the act has introduced. Our policy must be framed so as to secure that 'reasonable preference' is given to certain categories of housing need. The reasonable preference categories include:-

- a) People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7)
- b) People who are owed a duty under s190(2) (homeless, priority need but intentionally homeless); s193(2) (full homelessness duty); s195(2) (threatened with homelessness and in priority need) or s192(3) (homeless but non priority)
- c) People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions

- d) People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including any grounds relating to a disability)
- e) People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others)

In adopting any new policy we must ensure that the following principles are applied:-

- Allocations should only be made to those who are eligible
- Every local authority must have an allocation scheme for determining priorities with clear procedures in allocating accommodation
- The scheme must include a choice of housing accommodation or the opportunity for the applicant to express preference about their housing accommodation
- The scheme should be framed so as to secure reasonable preference
- We must have regard to our Homeless Strategy and Strategic Tenancy Policy
- Before adopting a new scheme all housing providers should be consulted, allowing a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals
- We must not allocate housing accommodation except in accordance with our adopted allocation policy.

A full review of our allocations policy is required to discuss how Wiltshire would like to frame its allocation policy based on the new freedoms introduced. We are therefore engaging with area boards across Wiltshire and involving members at the start and during the whole review process.

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