

**Wiltshire Council**

**Environment Select Committee**

**Date: 18 August 2015**

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## **Housing Allocation Policy – Implementation Update**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To provide the Environment Select committee with enough information to determine whether further action from scrutiny is required.

### **Background**

2. The purpose of the allocation policy is to set a framework for Wiltshire Council and its partners for the registration, assessment and allocation of affordable homes. The allocation policy describes how applicants for affordable housing are assessed ensuring that those in greatest housing need are prioritised for the allocation of affordable housing in Wiltshire.

3 Wiltshire's revised allocation policy was fully implemented in February 2015 and remains a choice based lettings scheme that covers the whole of Wiltshire. The scheme determines priorities and procedures for the allocation of affordable housing across Wiltshire, including:-

- Eligibility and exclusion criteria for registration
- Property size criteria
- Banding structure that determines how applicants will be assessed and prioritised.
- How homes will be allocated

Our bands are explained in Appendix 1 and 2. Band 1 being the most urgent housing need to Band 4 which is low need.

4. When considering if further work from scrutiny is required, please be aware that the Associate Director of Adult Care and Housing has requested a Peer Review between 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015, and as part of this review, they will be looking at the effectiveness of the policy, taking into account the effects of recent service changes and how the policy meets local need. We are currently in the process of writing a self assessment to better understand our current position and as part of the review we will be consulting with housing staff, other internal departments, members, housing providers, customers and other external organisations.

### **Main Considerations for the Council**

**A breakdown of former and current housing register figures, including total applications being received and total being re-housed, as well as other relevant information.**

5. Below is a breakdown of the housing register taken just before we activated the 8 week implementation process from December 2014 until February 2015.

<b>1<sup>st</sup> December 2014</b>	
<b>Band</b>	<b>Applicants</b>
Platinum	315
Gold Plus	722
Gold	4799
Silver	5789
Bronze	9045
	<b>20,676</b>

6. Although we had 20,676 applicants on our register we had not data cleansed the system for a number of years which meant we had a lot of old outdated applications that should have been closed. The 9,045 in the former bronze band were also de-activated in December 2014 due to having no identified housing need and were offered the opportunity to join the open market register. When letters were sent out to all applicants, we had several thousand returned as no longer at that address or unknown.

7. Below is a breakdown of the register taken on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 as well as a more recent breakdown on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015. It shows the number of applicants on the register by band of need; Band 1 and 2 are the highest need while the Open Market Register (OMR) is those with no housing need.

<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2015</b>	
Band 1	129
Band 2	7
Band 3	564
Band 4	484
	<b>1184</b>
OMR	141

<b>7<sup>th</sup> July 2015</b>	
Band 1	131
Band 2	7
Band 3	653
Band 4	580
	<b>1371</b>
OMR	202

8. You can see that the numbers on the register are gradually increasing. We currently receive around 300 new applications per month and those classified as being re-housed is around 150 a month. We are therefore seeing an increase of around 150 applicants a month, but we are still in the early stages as this can't be considered as a stable assessment of ongoing need at this stage.

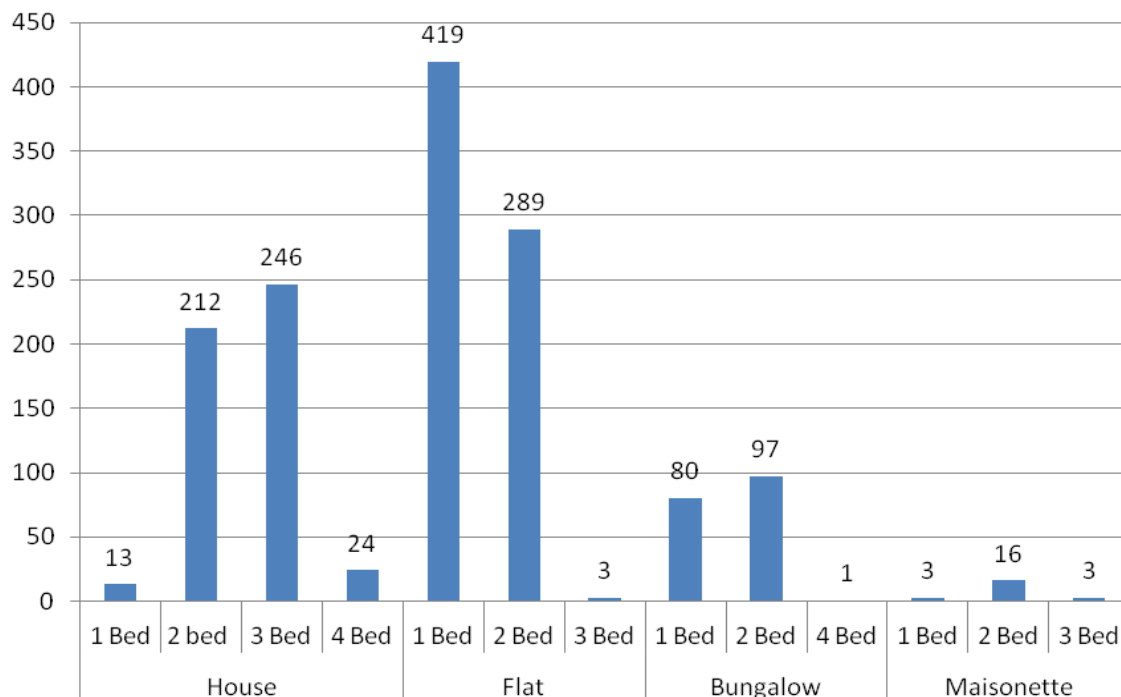
9. The following table shows the number of households on the register by band of need indicating the total percentage of the register as well as the total percentage of applicants housed from each band.

	Number	% of total register	% Housed
Band 1	131	8.3	19
Band 2	7	0.4	0.95
Band 3	653	41.5	39.9
Band 4	580	36.9	27.7
OMR	202	12.8	11.7
Total	1,543	100.0	100.0

10. Applicants in Band 3 and 4 account for nearly 80% of the people on the housing register while just over 8% of the households on the register are in the highest need of social housing (Bands 1 and 2). However when comparing to those who have been housed, 20% of the lettings are going to those in Bands 1 and 2 who make up just over 8% of the housing register with over 65% of properties being allocated to households in bands 3 and 4. The OMR makes up just over 12% of the housing register and has seen just over 11% of properties allocated to households in this band since February.

11. From February to July, 1406 properties have been advertised through Homes4Wiltshire; of these 1406 properties, 241 required the property to be advertised more than once. The figures of repeat adverts have not been included in the total figures; vacant properties advertised through Homes 4 Wiltshire have only been counted once to give a better understanding of the actual number of properties that have been available for let and to ensure repeat adverts do not lead to disproportionate results.

12. Below is a breakdown of total properties advertised by property type:



13 In relation to the higher demand areas (based on bidding alone) the table below breaks down the properties, by bids and Community Area

### Average bids by Community Area

Community Area	Total Properties	Total Bids	Average bids per property type
Amesbury	72	1270	17.63
Bradford on Avon	61	479	7.85
Calne	111	1101	9.91
Chippenham	117	1733	14.81
Corsham	44	243	5.52
Devizes	110	889	8.08
Downton	27	425	15.74
Malmesbury	32	211	6.59
Marlborough	40	240	6
Melksham	86	837	9.73
Mere	18	44	2.44
Pewsey	25	129	5.16
Royal Wootton Bassett & Cricklade	125	706	5.64
Salisbury	157	3267	20.80
Tidworth	60	462	7.7
Tisbury	13	54	4.15
Trowbridge	174	2428	13.95
Warminster	59	392	6.64
Westbury	62	544	8.77
Wilton	13	159	12.23

14 As you can see the Community Areas of Amesbury, Chippenham, Downton, Salisbury, Trowbridge and Wilton have all received higher than average bids for vacancies in their area. Bids seem to be generally higher in the South; in particular in Salisbury where 3267 bids were placed against 157 properties, however in contrast Mere received the lowest average number of bids with just 2.44 bids on average per property.

15 The statistics provided in this report are an overview of what can be reported from the system. We are still in the very early stages of the new allocation policy and are monitoring the statistics very closely.

### Number of complaints received

16. Since March 2015 we have received a total of 10 complaints in regard to the Homes4Wiltshire service and all have been fully investigated and no failings were identified and so the complaints were not upheld.

### Issues identified following the introduction of the policy

17. Since the introduction of the policy we have experienced some technical IT issues which are being addressed and have only impacted on the back office functions rather than the front office, so no impact on customers. This is likely to be completed within the next 4 weeks.

18. Due to the reduction in the size of the register and the removal of those clients with no housing need we are finding it difficult to let 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor flats, 2 bed bungalows and older people sheltered bedsits. Sheltered bedsits have always been an on-going issue, but the flats and 2 bed bungalows have always been let relatively quickly in the past.

19. As well as a change in policy we have also had the introduction of the bedroom standard which has prevented the ability for us to allocate 2 bed properties to singles or couples and most of our 2 bed 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> floor flats went to those applicants who had no children as families prefer to bid for houses.

20. The chart below includes the total number of flats advertised, including Older Peoples accommodation, by bedroom and floor level, including the total amount of bids received.

Floor	1 Bed	Average Bids	2 Bed	Average Bids	3 Bed	Average Bids
GF	207	14.64	122	5.2	1	4
1 <sup>st</sup>	162	14.2	115	4.56	2	5.5
2 <sup>nd</sup>	41	16.51	52	4.42	0	0
3 <sup>rd</sup>	5	14.6	2	2	0	0
4 <sup>th</sup>	2	1	0	0	0	0
Basement	1	18	0	0	0	0

21. From a high level it is clear to see that 1 bed flats are in high demand with households seemingly not phased by the floor on which the flat is located, with 2<sup>nd</sup> floor flats receiving (on average) the highest number of bids.

22. When looking at the number of these flats which are for general needs and those for older people the comparison indicates a clear interest for 1 bedroom accommodation for general needs housing. When you remove the older people number from the totals it only increases the average number of bids for 1 bed general needs accommodation.

Bed	Floor	General Needs	Average Bids	Older Peoples	Average Bids
1	GF	100	26.6	56	1.5
	1 <sup>st</sup>	82	25.53	40	1.42
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	26	24.8	6	0.5
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3	24	1	1
	4 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	2	1
	Basement	1	18	0	0
2	GF	101	6.16	10	0.2
	1 <sup>st</sup>	98	5.03	2	0
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	48	4.62	0	0
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	4	0	0

	4 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	0	0
	Basement	0	0	0	0
3	GF	1	4	0	0
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2	5.5	0	0
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	0	0	0	0
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	0	0	0	0
	4 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	0	0
	Basement	0	0	0	0

23. With regard to bungalow accommodation, it has made up around 13% of the total number of vacancies, which has created 178 properties being advertised. Of these 178 properties, 39 of those adverts have received zero bids. We are looking into this further to understand where the low demand is and for what size accommodation.

### **Options and information available to customers (on line paper forms)**

24. We receive on average 150 new applications a month. We are encouraging as many of these as possible to be completed on line, however we can take paper application if the client does not have access to on line facilities and we are also able to take paper applications. We receive around 4 to 5 paper applications a week and a couple a month are completed on the phone with the client directly

### **Update on previous scrutiny report**

25. All recommendations from overview and scrutiny have been considered and actioned. Appendix 3 provides a full update on each of the recommended actions.

### **Conclusions**

26. We are still in the first 6 months following the implementation of a significant policy change and we are currently not yet in a stable position with regard to our statistics but are regularly reviewing and monitoring them. During the first week in October the Housing team will be subjected to a peer review which will include a review of the Allocations service.

### **Proposal**

27. For the Environment committee to consider the information contained within the report and determine if further involvement from Scrutiny is required.

**Mr James Cawley**  
**Associate Director Adult Care and Housing**

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18<sup>th</sup> August 2015

### **Background Papers**

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Brief summary of bands
- Appendix 2 – Customer banding information
- Appendix 3 - Update on Scrutiny report