

Cherwell District Council

Executive

1 June 2015

<p>Revision to Housing Allocation Scheme (as approved in November 2012)</p>
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Report of Head of Regeneration and Housing

This report is public

Purpose of report

To approve revisions to the Council's Allocation Scheme (as approved in November 2012)

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To accept the revisions to the Housing Allocations Scheme.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 In November, 2012, the Council implemented a new and innovative Allocation Scheme taking account of the changes to legislation, namely the Localism Act 2011 and the new Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance developed as a consequence of that.

2.2 The new scheme met all of the Council's strategic priorities within its Housing Strategy 2012-17 not least:

- House our most vulnerable residents; and
- Prevent homelessness

2.3 The new Scheme saw a reduction in numbers able to access the Scheme due to the removal of those applicants who were not qualified, namely:

- Those who owned another property
- Those who had sufficient resources to meet their housing needs i.e. those with income, assets or capital exceeding £60,000
- Those who had no local connection with Cherwell

- Those who refused suitable offers of accommodation
- Those whose behaviour was unacceptable namely those with a history of rent arrears or behaviour which had they been a secure tenant the Council could have obtained possession; and
- Those without any recognised housing need within the terms of the reasonable preference categories set by legislation under s167 (2) Housing Act 1996.

2.4 As a consequence of these changes, the list significantly decreased by 2,454 applicants who fell into the above categories.

2.5 This enabled the Council to focus on those with the most housing need within Cherwell to ensure that they gained access to the social housing made available by our Registered Providers, formerly known as Housing Associations.

3.0 Report Details

3.1 Cherwell, as a district, is an extremely desirable place to live and as a result significant development of accommodation to meet the demand of those wishing to live in the District has been and is still being undertaken.

3.2 In order for development to be allowed, through the Planning Process, provision has to be made to the Local Authority through their Registered Provider partners for the development of affordable housing i.e. social housing.

3.3 Obviously it takes a long time to develop a scheme for planning purposes and therefore in terms of allocation and demand for accommodation, consideration is given to those being considered within the Allocation Scheme as part of the requirements for development at the planning stage. As demographics change and the Allocation Scheme alters this means (as we are experiencing), in Cherwell the demand for accommodation now, namely one and two bedroom general purpose units, does not match the current supply of new properties and voids becoming available.

3.4 As at 4 March 2015, there were 831 live applicants on the Housing Register and the table below sets out the current bedroom need:

Band	Bedroom Need				Total
	1	2	3	4	
1	74	17	6	1	98
2	171	244	79	25	519
3	144	56	12	2	214
Total	389	317	97	28	831

3.5 In terms of the one bedroom need, this is broken down further in terms of those requiring general purpose accommodation **210**, sheltered accommodation **140** and Extra Care accommodation **39**

3.6 Since the implementation of the new Allocation Scheme (December 2013), the tables below set out the number of social housing properties that have been made available to the Council to let via the Allocation Scheme as at 4 March 2015:

Bedroom size	1	2	3	4	Total
General Needs	96	173	124	14	407
Sheltered	66	19	1	0	86
Extra Care	19	28	0	0	47
Combined Total	181	220	125	14	540

3.7 Within this there have been several new developments which have required allocation to:

Scheme/bedroom	1	2	3	4
Conyger Fields, Steeple Aston	2	2	5	1
Murcott Road, Arccott	2	5	2	1
Oak Farm, Milcombe	0	4	2	0
Kingsmere, Bicester	1	8	4	0
Longford Park, Bodicote	0	12	5	0
Portland Road, Milcombe	2	5	0	0
Launton Road, Bicester	2	1	2	0
Weston on the Green	0	4	2	0
Broughton Road, Banbury	4	0	0	0
St Annes House, Banbury	5	0	0	0

3.8 Added to this within the next 12 months the following developments will be coming available for letting, namely:

Scheme/bedroom	1	2	3	4
Yew Tree Farm, Launton	0	6	4	0
Crouch Hill, Banbury	0	2	4	0
Chestnut Close, Launton	0	3	1	0
Kingsmere, Bicester	0	3	5	0
Springfield Farm, Ambrosden	13	0	0	0
Warwick Road, Banbury	4	18	0	0
Thornbury House, Kidlington	24	15	0	0
Coach House Mews, Bicester	0	12	0	0
Woodpiece Road, Arccott	0	3	0	0
Calthorpe House, Banbury	0	15	0	0
Upper Heyford	0	5	10	3
Eco Town,	6	21	8	0

Bicester				
Oxford Road, Bodicote	0	1	3	0

3.9 As a consequence of this and as agreed when the Allocation Scheme was approved the Council has reviewed the current Scheme to ensure that it meets not only the needs of the most vulnerable within the District but also the supply of accommodation that is coming available to ensure that we meet our nomination requirements, namely the percentage of void stock that registered providers have to give to the Council to let each year.

Findings from the review

3.10 The review found that the Council is meeting its target to ensure that only the most vulnerable residents within the District are being let social housing. As with the requirements of choice based lettings, applicants who are eligible and qualified to be part of the Scheme are able to bid for the accommodation they would prefer.

3.11 The review found that generally applicants are bidding for the properties and there does not appear too much of a problem in getting the properties let but in some circumstances due to the size, nature and/or location of the available accommodation, some properties are taking several cycles of the choice based lettings scheme to be let.

3.12 The review found that this appeared to be greatest in terms of extra care accommodation and three bedroom accommodation. In terms of the three and four bedroom accommodation the main reason for this is welfare reform which restricts applicants, particularly those on low income and benefits who require the assistance of Housing Benefit, from only being able to be considered for the property size that they are deemed to be required. For example a household with a boy and girl child would, pre welfare reform, have been considered for a three bedroom property but now this will be dependent on their age and whether they are able to share a bedroom.

3.13 The review also found that those who were placed in the highest bands, namely bands 1 and 2 may not be bidding for suitable accommodation as the ethos of any choice based lettings scheme is that applicants can choose where they would prefer to live.

3.14 As a result of these findings the following recommendations are made to tackle the potential issues with regard to meeting our nomination targets with Registered Providers over the next one to two years.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

There is a lack of supply of one and two bedroom accommodation to meet the need of the most vulnerable households within the district. The limited supply needs to be targeted towards the most vulnerable. There is an oversupply of larger accommodation, namely 3 and 4 bedroom properties, extra care accommodation and some sheltered accommodation. Measures need to be put in place to ensure that this oversupply, where possible, is met and let to those with a local connection to Cherwell to ensure that Registered Providers are not able to openly let them i.e.

to anyone in the country who would like to live in Cherwell through vehicles such as Rightmove and Zoopla.

1. Access to the Allocation Scheme be expanded to include those who are qualified but don't have a recognised housing need under s167(2) Housing Act 1996.

Research by the Council shows that of the 2,454 applicants who were previously removed from the Scheme, some 1,091 applicants are likely to fit into this category and the Council intends to contact all those previous applicants to determine whether they wish to be re-included within the new Scheme, as long as they qualify as per the qualification criteria set out above.

It is recommended that any applicants who fit into this category will be in a "Reserve Band" which will only be considered if there are no suitable applicants to meet the supply of accommodation, within Bands 1, 2 and 3.

2. Those who are given banding with Bands 1 and 2 will be time limited within that band to ensure that are bidding for suitable accommodation that becomes available within the District. It is recommended that the banding be awarded for 3 months and then be reviewed. This will enable officers to see whether applicants are actively bidding to reflect their housing need. It will be possible to extend the period in that band if no suitable properties have become available and the need for housing is still applicable.

When suitable properties become available, it is recommended that officers will contact appropriate applicants firstly to ensure that they are aware that a property is available and to encourage them to consider bidding for the same.

Where suitable properties are available and applicants are not actively seeking to resolve their housing need i.e. not bidding, then the banding will be removed and the applicant will be placed into the proposed Reserve Band.

3. Applicants, who are offered suitable accommodation within Bands 1 and 2, including the statutory homeless, and those who refused three consecutive offers within Band 3, will be disqualified from the Housing Register for 6 months. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure that those in housing need actively consider appropriate accommodation that becomes available as well as addressing the issue of getting the supply of accommodation being made available to the Council let as quickly as possible i.e. negating properties having to go through several cycles before they are let.

5.0 Consultation

Consultation has taken place with partner Registered Provider, statutory and voluntary agencies and staff. Please see Appendix Three

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not to accept any revisions to Cherwell's Allocation Scheme 2012

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The changes proposed to Cherwell's Allocation Scheme can be implemented within existing budgets and using existing staff resources.

Comments checked by:

Paul Sutton, Head of Finance and Procurement,
Paul.Sutton@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 The changes proposed to Cherwell's Allocation scheme will increase the opportunities for Cherwell residents to compete for social housing vacancies across the District in line with the legal framework which governs social housing lettings as set out in the Housing Act 1986 part V1.

Comments checked by:

Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance,
Kevin.Lane@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

Risk

- 7.3 The changes proposed to Cherwell's Allocation Scheme will strengthen the Councils ability to ensure that all vacancies of social and affordable rented housing will be allocated to those in housing need within the District. This will be managed as part of the operation risk register within the team and escalate any risks as and when appropriate.

Comments checked by:

Louise Tustain, Acting Corporate Performance Manager, 01295 221786
Louise.Tustian2@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: Yes

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

District of Opportunity
Thriving Communities

Lead Councillor

Councillor John Donaldson
Lead Member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Appendix 1	Revised Allocation Scheme
Appendix 2	Highlights of changes made to Allocation Scheme
Appendix 3	Consultation Details
Background Papers	
None	
Report Author	Marianne North, Housing Needs Manager
Contact Information	01295 227946 Marianne.north@cherwell-dc.gov.uk