

<b>This report is public</b>	
<b>New Cherwell District Council Housing Allocations Scheme</b>	
<b>Committee</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee</b>	8 July 2024
<b>Portfolio Holder presenting the report</b>	Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Chris Pruden
<b>Date Portfolio Holder agreed report</b>	13 June 2024
<b>Report of</b>	Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing, Nicola Riley

## **Purpose of report**

To seek approval to consult on a new Housing Allocations Scheme

## **1. Recommendations**

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To approve the commencement of public consultation on the reviewed and amended Housing Allocations Scheme
- 1.2 To approve the changes to the previously agreed approach, of allocating properties that are delivered through Oxford's Unmet Housing Need. This will enable discussions and a potential agreement with Oxford City Council to progress. The approach outlined in this report is reflected in the new draft policy.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 The Allocations Scheme is the Policy that ensures the fair allocation of social housing properties within District and is used for the administration of the waiting list for social housing, which is part of our statutory duties.
- 2.2 The Council reviews its scheme regularly to ensure it remains compliant with legislation and is also still meeting the needs of applicants in the best way
- 2.3 Included within the existing scheme was reference to Oxford's Unmet Housing Need and how properties would be allocated when available, this followed a decision being made by Executive in 2020 regarding the allocation of these properties. The agreed approach is now considered to be undeliverable by both Cherwell and Oxford City Council.

## Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
<b>Finance</b>	There are no new financial implications outlined in the report as the existing arrangement is captured in the base revenue budget Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 22 May 2024			
<b>Legal</b>	There are no direct legal implications arising from this report or the new scheme. Shahin Ismail, Interim Head of Legal Services, 28 May 2024			
<b>Risk Management</b>	As it is part of our statutory housing duties, to not review the policy to ensure it is compliant with legislation, is fair and inclusive and is meeting the needs of the District would present a risk. Therefore, a regular review of this policy is prudent as part of mitigating actions for this risk. This and any further risks will be managed through the Service Operational Risk, and will be escalated to the Leadership Risk Register as and when deemed necessary. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 28 May 2024			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
<b>Equality Impact</b>	x			An Equalities and Climate Impact Assessment is included as an Appendices of the report
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			The Allocations Scheme provides a framework of how social housing is allocated within Cherwell. It ensures the prioritisation of certain household circumstances based on what the legislation or on local demand factors. The work of the team and support provided ensures that vulnerable groups are able to access the services of the team.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			Many vulnerable groups assisted by the team and who are accessing the waiting list for housing will have protected characteristics. As part of any application, all protected characteristics that an applicant may have are captured as part of this process. This is primarily for monitoring purposes, but it does allow for adjustments to be made.
<b>Climate &amp; Environmental Impact</b>		x		Policy does not relate to delivery of new homes or the quality of existing property
<b>ICT &amp; Digital Impact</b>		x		Not applicable
<b>Data Impact</b>		x		Not applicable
<b>Procurement &amp; subsidy</b>		x		Not applicable

<b>Council Priorities</b>	Housing that meets your needs
<b>Human Resources</b>	Not applicable
<b>Property</b>	Not applicable
<b>Consultation &amp; Engagement</b>	The recommendations within the report are for the revised Allocations Scheme to proceed to public consultation.

## Supporting Information

### 3. Background

- 3.1 As part of statutory duties, the Council manages the waiting list for social housing and also allocates social housing properties within Cherwell on behalf of Registered Providers of social housing that have housing stock within the District. The Council no longer has a significant stock holding of its own following a transfer of its housing stock to what is now Sanctuary Housing. The waiting list comprises of around 2000 households that have varying degrees of housing need. The prioritisation of this need is set out within the Allocations Scheme.
- 3.2 The Allocations Scheme provides the framework for assessment and prioritisation of housing applicants. The Allocations Scheme just covers allocation of social housing and does not cover temporary accommodation, supported accommodation, Extra Care or Shared Ownership schemes.
- 3.3 The prioritisation and administration of housing applications and applicants is outlined within legislation, however, Council's do have some flexibilities to be able to manage and administer their own schemes and prioritise certain applicant circumstances.
- 3.4 The Allocations Scheme was last reviewed in 2021. It is good practice to regularly review schemes to ensure they are compliant with legislation but also to respond to emerging trends and needs.
- 3.5 As part of the management of the waiting list and allocation of social housing, the Council has been working with Oxford City Council regarding the discharge of future allocations of property that have been developed as part of Oxford's Unmet Housing Need. Oxford's Unmet Housing Need relates to social housing being delivered outside the Oxford City boundary, but is for Oxford City Council qualified residents on the first letting. These properties are yet to be delivered in Cherwell, but arrangements covering how they will be allocated have begun and require formalising.
- 3.6 A decision by the Executive in 2020 outlined that Oxford City Council would administer the applications for the Oxford's Unmet Housing Need properties that were delivered within Cherwell and Cherwell District Council would not be involved in the process.

## **4. Details**

- 4.1 The report and its appendices detail the principal changes that the new draft Allocations Scheme makes to the existing scheme that is currently in operation. This includes a summary table of the main changes and the rationale for the change being made.
- 4.2 However, below is a brief summary of some of the main changes proposed
- An increase in priority for those who are homeless
  - A creation of a banding for survivors of Domestic Abuse.
  - A review of the income and savings thresholds, which dictate who may be eligible to join the register
  - A change in the way overcrowded households are administered
  - Additional preference given to those covered by the Armed Forces Covenant
  - To accommodate the changes outlined within the report for the future administration of allocations for Oxford's Unmet Housing Need
- 4.3 With regard to Oxford's Unmet Housing Need, as outlined in Section 3, an approach to allocation that was previously agreed by the Executive. Following protracted discussions between parties and acknowledging the experiences of other authorities, it has been decided that the previously agreed approach may not be workable.
- 4.4 An alternative solution, that involves the Cherwell allocating the properties and administering the applications as it does routinely within District, has been discussed. This is the same approach currently being adopted or proposed by neighbouring authorities in managing the delivery of Oxford's Unmet Housing Need properties within their respective district areas.
- 4.5 This approach would also mean that Cherwell would retain control of allocations of social housing within the District, instead of another Council being involved and allocating social housing within Cherwell and its own area. Whilst additional applications to the team could create pressure on resources, it is not anticipated that pressures would be significant or would be beyond the existing resources of the team. With the agreement from the Executive for a change in approach, discussions regarding the practical allocation of these units in the future can recommence.
- 4.6 Subject to the report being approved, the new draft Allocations Scheme will begin a public consultation phase that will include all the major stakeholders involved in housing and the allocation of property. This includes partners that work for Registered Providers of social housing and statutory agencies, such as health and social care. When the consultation is complete and the responses analysed, the final version of the scheme will return to the Executive for approval.

## **5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

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

Option 1: Not bring forward a new Allocations Scheme. This is rejected as it is  
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important that the Council has Policies that are up to date with legislation and can respond to current challenges.

Option 2: Continue discussions with Oxford City regarding the previously agreed approach to allocating the unmet need properties. Both Councils have been working to deliver the agreed solution, and delivery of this may be possible. However, this is rejected as there is a concern that the approach may not be legally sound, so to continue is not considered prudent, and thus an alternative has been suggested.

## 6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 It is important that the Council has up to date policies and procedures for its statutory and key service areas and it is important that they are legislatively and operationally sound. A periodic review of policies is therefore appropriate.

### Decision Information

<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes
<b>Subject to Call in</b>	Yes
<b>If not, why not subject to call in</b>	Not applicable
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	All wards

### Document Information

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	New Allocations Scheme – draft for consultation
<b>Appendix 2</b>	New Allocations Scheme - summary of main changes
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Equalities and Climate Impact Assessment
<b>Background Papers</b>	None
<b>Reference Papers</b>	None
<b>Report Author</b>	Richard Smith – Head of Housing
<b>Report Author contact details</b>	richard.smith@cherwell-dc.gov.uk 01295 221640