

| Report of | Meeting | Date |
|--|-------------------|---------------|
| Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy (Introduced by the Executive Member for Homes and Business) | Executive Cabinet | 21 March 2013 |

THE DRAFT SELECT MOVE COMMON ALLOCATIONS POLICY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The Select Move Steering Group has reviewed its allocations policy and this report seeks permission to consult on the new draft policy

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. i) That the Executive Cabinet approves the policy enabling the Select Move partnership to consult on the policy.

ii) Any other minor changes to the policy prior to consultation are delegated for approval to the Executive Member for Homes and Business.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. In order to respond to the Localism Act 2011 and meet the aims of partners the Select Move Common Allocations Policy has been re-written
4. Localism allowed more freedom to determine which groups of people don't qualify to join the housing register – and changes have been made in the policy to reflect this. Households without a local connection to the three council's in the Select Move partnership are one group of people who will not qualify, and a change to short listing allowing Local Authority connection to give priority within each band will help more Chorley properties to be allocated to Chorley households.
5. Changes have been made to assist armed forces by allowing them to qualify regardless of local connection and awarding additional preference through banding date.
6. Banding categories have been added to assist those households under and over-occupying gain priority with a view to mitigating welfare reform changes, and households in no priority have less chance of being allocated a property due to a change in the quota and removal of the good tenant priority category.
7. It is hoped the changes will ensure higher percentage of Chorley properties are allocated to Chorley households, and more assistance will be available for households affected by welfare reform.

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| Confidential report Please bold as appropriate | Yes | No |
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| Key Decision? Please bold as appropriate | Yes | No |
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| Reason Please bold as appropriate | 1, a change in service provision that impacts upon the service revenue budget by £100,000 or more | 2, a contract worth £100,000 or more |
| | 3, a new or unprogrammed capital scheme of £100,000 or more | 4, Significant impact in environmental, social or physical terms in two or more wards |

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

8. To respond to changes in legislation whilst fulfilling Chorley Council’s Part VI statutory duties and maximising the allocation of Chorley properties to households with a local connection to the borough.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

9. No other options considered.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

10. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

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| Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all | ✓ | A strong local economy | |
| Clean, safe and healthy communities | | An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area | ✓ |

BACKGROUND

11. Each Local Authority is required to publish an allocations policy under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, and the policy should demonstrate how the Local Authority will co-ordinate access to social housing in its area. Select Move is a partnership including the three Central Lancashire councils (Chorley, Preston and South Ribble) and 9 housing associations which operate in the area, and the Select Move Common Allocations Policy fulfils Chorley’s Part VI obligation.
12. Select Move allocates properties using Choice Based Letting methodology which replaced waiting on a housing list to be allocated a property. Properties are advertised on the Select Move website each week, and applicants can express interest on the homes in which they wish to live. Applicants are then short listed depending on need (determined by band) and time in the band.
13. It has been necessary to re-write the allocations policy due to the Localism Act 2011, which gives Local Authorities scope to decide who qualifies to be on the Housing Register, and required changes to assist Armed Forces personnel (including ex armed forces and their families).
14. The report concentrates on the main changes between the 2013 draft policy and the current 2010 policy.

15. The Draft Policy is almost finalised with all partners. However because there is not an Executive Cabinet meeting after March until June it was considered appropriate to seek Executive Cabinet approval to the policy changes to date, and any other minor changes that may arise between now and the end of March can be signed off by the Executive Member for Homes and Business. This approach will ensure there is no delay in commencing the consultation once the consultation draft is finalised.

THE DRAFT SELECT MOVE COMMON ALLOCATIONS POLICY

16. The current Select Move Common Allocations Policy was published in April 2010. The Select Move steering group has been re-writing the policy over several months, and as part of this group Chorley Council has been seeking to help maximise the lets of properties in the borough to households with a local connection to Chorley whilst meeting our statutory duties.

Qualifying Households

17. The Localism Act 2011 gave more scope for Local Authorities to determine who qualifies for the Housing Register – which in our case is Select Move.
18. The draft policy sets out that households who do not have a ‘local connection’ to any of the three Local Authorities in the Select Move area do not qualify to join the Select Move common housing register.
19. Local connection qualification is not needed by Armed Forces if they are currently serving or apply within 5 years of their service ending – they will be given automatic local connection for each of the three Local Authorities in the Select Move area.
20. Home owners will not qualify, unless the Local Authority has a statutory duty to assist (e.g. homelessness cases where an applicant can’t return home because of domestic violence but is still a joint owner) – or unless their housing needs can only be met by social housing (e.g. example sheltered).
21. Applicants with a gross household income of £60k or more or £30k savings/assets will not qualify.
22. The household will not qualify any member has been convicted of a serious offence that has not been spent and is likely to pose a threat or risk to any partner of the scheme, tenants, local community or staff
23. In certain circumstances the households will not qualify if a member of the household has engaged in anti-social behaviour such that action has been taken, or could have been taken, against the person – such as an injunction, ASBO, demotion order or possession order.
24. A household will not qualify if they have housing related debts of £1,000 or over (e.g. rent arrears or sundry debts) that can be proven by the landlord. In the case of Private Sector debt a County Court Judgement or proven court action will be needed as evidence of the debt.
25. A household will not qualify if they have housing related debts under £1,000 and an appropriate payment plan is not in place and maintained.
26. A household will not qualify that passes the habitual residency test and does not have access to public funding and has insufficient income or savings to sustain a tenancy.

27. Mitigating circumstances will be taken into account in individual cases for reasons on non-qualification e.g. households owed a duty under homelessness legislation who have housing related debts.

Local Connection Changes to Shortlisting

28. As well a local connection needed to access the common housing register, local connection to individual local authority will be used to give priority within each band when shortlisting. The following will be used to shortlist properties in order of priority:
- Households with a minimum bedroom need that matches the property size
 - Households in a matching band
 - Households with a local connection to the local authority within each band
 - Households with the oldest effective banding date
29. Bidders in the band the property is advertised in will be shortlisted first, however the next band to be shortlisted will be the highest the property was not advertised in, and then the remaining bands in descending order of priority (A to E). For example a property advertised in Band C will be shortlisted C, A, B D, then E. After Band E applicants with a matching bedroom size have been shortlisted, those households under-occupying by 1 bedroom will be shortlisted using the same criteria if applicable, and then the 2 bedroom under-occupiers using the same method. Under-occupying households would only ever be offered a property if they could demonstrate economic viability.
30. The only change to shortlisting is the local connection to Local Authority criteria used to give priority within each band, and this applies within each band only. For example a property located in Chorley advertised in Band A would give priority to Band A applicants with a local connection to Chorley before short listing those with only a local connection to at least one of the two other Local Authorities within Band A. After all Band A applicants have been shortlisted then Band B applicants with a local connection to Chorley would be shortlisted before other Band B applicants and so on.

Non-Qualifying Households

31. Applicants who don't qualify for reasons such as local connection, homeowners or savings/assets, but pass verification checks may apply directly to a partner RP to go on an Open Market Register for properties that were unable to be let through Select Move. Chorley Council will not process any applications once it has been established that the applicants do not qualify for the Select Move common housing register.

Changes to Banding Criteria

32. Tenants of partner landlords who are under-occupying by one bedroom and will face hardship due to this because of benefit changes will be awarded Band D – this is additional to those under-occupying by two or more bedrooms being awarded band B. Currently households of partner landlords under-occupying by one bedroom get no priority.
33. Households of any tenure over-occupying by one bedroom will be awarded band D. Currently over-occupying by one bedroom gave no priority.
34. It is hoped the two changes directly above will assist households affected by benefit changes to move into suitably sized properties by helping to re-balance household size and need. Also good tenants of partner landlords are currently awarded Band D; however this has been removed in the draft strategy in order to allow households in housing need have better chance of obtaining a property.

35. The draft policy awards Band B to prospective foster carers and adopters if they require larger accommodation if this has been recommended by Children’s Service – this scenario is not covered in the current policy.

Banding Quotas

36. A quota system for allocating properties will still be used however the 5% allocated to Band E will be reduced to zero and the allocation to Band C will be increased from 15 to 20%. The way the bands are shortlisted has not been changed from the current policy, and the proposed banding for the draft policy are as follows:

- Band A – 40%
- Band B – 30%
- Band C – 20% (previously 15%)
- Band D – 10%
- Band E – 0% (previously 5%)

Armed Forces priority

37. Current or former UK Armed Forces who qualify to join the common allocations policy will have their effective banding date back dated by a period of time equivalent to their length of service time in order to afford them additional priority within their respective band.

Objectives

It is expected that the policy changes will ensure that a higher percentage of properties let in the borough are allocated to households with a Chorley Local Connection, due to the changes in shortlisting and qualification that are proposed. Alterations to banding categories awarded priority should give the opportunity to households affected by welfare reform to move to more suitable properties. The draft allocations policy aims to fulfil Chorley Council’s Part VI obligation as well as post-localism requirements, whilst assisting the Council to meet its statutory duty to homeless households.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

38. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors’ comments are included:

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| Finance | ✓ | Customer Services | |
| Human Resources | | Equality and Diversity | |
| Legal | ✓ | Integrated Impact Assessment required? | |
| No significant implications in this area | | Policy and Communications | ✓ |

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

39. There are no costs associated with amending the Policy, but updates will need to be provided by the software supplier which will be shared amongst Partners and will be contained within the Council’s current cash budgets.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

40. There are no legal restrictions that prevent the proposed alterations to the Allocations Policy.

COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

41. It is appropriate to revise the policy given the legislative requirements, and that the changed policy should be consulted on with key stakeholders before it is finalised

LESLEY-ANN FENTON
DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS, PLANNING AND POLICY

| Background Papers | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| Document | Date | File | Place of Inspection |
| Select Move Common Allocations Policy | 6 th March 2013 | *** | Mod.Gov |

| Report Author | Ext | Date | Doc ID |
|----------------------|------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Mick Coogan | 5552 | 6 th March 2013 | *** |