

**SUBMISSION BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE
HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY AND TENANCY STRATEGY MEMBER TASK GROUP**

HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY AND TENANCY STRATEGY

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the progress of the Task Group that was established at the January meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2. PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1 Two meetings of the Task Group have taken place on 24th February 2012 and 2nd March 2012 and each was attended by four Members of the Committee.
- 2.2 As Bromford Living operates the current Housing Register (UChoose) on the Council's behalf and the current housing allocation policy is a joint policy with the Council, senior officers of Bromford Living attended both meetings.
- 2.3 The first meeting was an introductory meeting to enable the Group to agree its purpose and develop an understanding of the issues. Terms of reference were approved in principle at this point by the Group – attached at **Appendix 1**
- 2.4 The Group received a presentation from officers that introduced the housing register, the current housing allocation scheme, how it is operated through the UChoose partnership and the role of Bromford Living. This included a history of the development of UChoose and the common allocations policy with UChoose partners.
- 2.5 The Group was advised that the current UChoose partnership ends in July 2013, and partners are considering their options and priorities in relation to the allocation of housing and the future delivery of the housing register.
- 2.6 The Group considered in detail
- The current priority bands within the existing allocation policy
 - A profile of the housing register including numbers of applications received, their priority banding and details of allocations made.
 - The software used to operate the register and how applicants apply.
 - The concept of “reasonable preference” that must be given to certain types of applicants in housing need.
 - Changes to the legislation and guidance particularly in relation to the ability to set eligibility criteria for applicants to be able to access the register, together with greater freedoms to give additional preference to particular types of applicants, e.g. those in employment, to meet identified local needs or preferences.
- 2.7 At the second meeting, on 2nd March, the group considered the views of Bromford Living and the Council's Housing Options Team in relation to housing allocations and changes to tenancies.
- 2.8 The key aims of Bromford Living include :-

- To make better use of their housing stock.
 - To promote transfers particularly where there is under-occupation.
 - To find ways to reward good tenants.
 - To develop a tenancy policy where tenancies are for a minimum of 5 years and 2 years in exceptional circumstances, e.g. where there is a history of minor anti social behaviour.
- 2.9 The group considered the introduction of fixed term tenancies for new tenants particularly in relation to security of tenure. The group discussed with Bromford Living evictions that had taken place during 2011/12, how those evicted could be re-housed and the role of the Council's Housing Options Team in dealing with those that present as homeless after eviction.
- 2.10 The group also considered the view of the Council's Housing Options Team (HOT), who use the housing register not only to ensure the Council can meet its statutory duty under the homelessness legislation but also use the register as a tool to prevent homelessness. The key issues raised by HOT include:-
- Greater clarity on Band 1 entitlement.
 - Evidence for Band 1 entitlement be sought and scrutinised before band 1 status is awarded
 - Consideration should be given to which groups, if any, amongst those accepted as statutorily homeless should be given additional priority to enable them to be placed in Band 1+ eg those in bed and breakfast or those homeless at home.
 - To consider the entitlement to remain in Band 1 of those applicants who refuse suitable offers or who have not expressed an interest in vacant properties for some time
 - To reconsider the criteria for local connection
 - To reconsider the criteria for overcrowding.
- 2.11 A detailed analysis of housing applicants in 2011 was considered by the group ranging from age analysis and employment to local connection. A total of 57% of applicants in 2011 had never made an expression of interest for a property
- 2.12 The Group considered key issues and questions for the review of the housing allocation policy – attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.13 The Group agreed that further meetings are required to further consider the key issues and questions, together with a draft tenancy strategy.

3.	RECOMMENDATION
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- 3.1 Members to comment on the work to date and note the report

HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY AND TENANCY STRATEGY**MEMBER TASK GROUP****TERMS OF REFERENCE****Allocation Policy**

1. To scrutinise and review the existing housing allocation policy having regard to;
 - The operation of the UChoose housing register
 - Existing priority bandings
 - Council nomination rights and the joint allocation
 - Meeting the Council's statutory homelessness duty
 - The views of the Housing Options Team
2. Consider and comment on the government consultation document "Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for all local housing authorities" which includes:
 - Overview of changes to legislation
 - Eligibility and qualification
 - Framing an allocation scheme
 - Allocation scheme management
3. To consider the Bromford Living perspective
 - Issues with existing priority bandings and policy generally
 - Views and any proposals for the joint allocation policy having regard to the changes in legislation.
 - Operation and delivery of UChoose
4. Consider key questions for the direction of the new allocation policy
5. Make recommendations to Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Environmental Protection on the key issues and priorities for the development of a revised allocation policy with Bromford Living and other District Council's where appropriate.
6. Receive and consider feedback from consultation with partners and housing applicants regarding the proposed changes to the allocation policy and make recommendations to Cabinet Member.

Tenancy Strategy

- 1 To consider the issues and priorities for a Tenancy Strategy including
 - What kind of tenancies should be granted by an RP
 - The circumstances in which an RP should grant a tenancy of a particular kind
 - Where tenancies are granted for a certain term what should the lengths of terms be and in what circumstances
 - The circumstances where an RP should grant a further tenancy on the ending of the existing tenancy.
 - The steps to be taken and advice made available when a fixed term tenancy is to end
2. To consider available draft RP Tenancy Policy.
3. To consider and comment on a draft Tenancy Strategy.
4. To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member

Housing Allocation Policy and Tenancy Strategy Members Panel

Key Issues and Questions for Members

Eligibility

Are there any groups of applicant that should not be eligible, for example-?

- Exclude those without a local connection/ do not live in the District
- Exclude those with no or low housing need
- Exclude those with sufficient funds to access market housing
- Exclude those with a record of unacceptable behaviour

Additional Preference

Should additional preference be given to applicants who:

- Are employed / self employed
- Have a local connection to the district or locality
- Live in the District or locality
- Have made contributions to the community
- Have insufficient funds to access market housing
- Are in difficult financial circumstances
- Are carers or foster parents
- Are disabled
- Are elderly or young
- Have been in the Armed Forces
- Have severe overcrowding in current home
- Those residing in or eligible for temporary accommodation provided by the Council

Priorities within Bands (ie those with the same levels of housing need)

- Length of time on list
- Length of time in band
- Financial circumstances
- Local Connection
- Employment
- Behaviour

Issues With High Needs Bands (Band1 and Band 1+)

Band 1 is too large, 175 On 22nd February 2012. Options include ,

- Clearer descriptions where possible for entitlement to the high need bands.
- Scrutiny of evidence for high needs bands prior to its award
- Limiting length of stay in high needs bands if no expressions of interest made,

Other

- Length of time applicants should remain on list or in band i.e. be demoted a band, where no expressions of interest are made.
- Priority for applicants with reasonable preference but with no local connection.