

TO: THE EXECUTIVE
13 JULY 2010

ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW
Director of Environment, Culture and Communities

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the Council's My Choice Housing Allocations Policy following the first six months of operation and to consider changes to the element of the policy which relates to out of borough applicants which is not operating as initially expected.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the order of priority for selecting successful bids for properties be amended and awarded on the basis of:**
- **Local connection followed by;**
 - **The applicant in the highest band (A-E)**
- 2.2 **That, within each band, priority be given to applicants according to the date of placement in the band; in cases where an applicant has 2 or more children, those with different genders where one is over 10 years will be prioritised ahead of those with younger children or children of the same gender.**
- 2.3 **That out of borough applicants will be considered on a case by case basis to identify whether a local connection with the borough can be established.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council's My Choice Housing Allocations Policy has been operating since January 2010, when the new BFC My Choice went live. While the new Allocations Policy is generally working well, the operation of the policy relating to out of borough applicants is not in line with the original policy objectives. This report proposes an alternative approach in order that the original policy objectives are met.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Allocations policy could be left to operate in its current format. However, this is likely to result in vacant RSL properties being allocated to applicants living outside the borough.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Council's My Choice Housing Allocations Policy has been operating since January 2010, when the new BFC My Choice went live. The Allocations Policy is

based on a banding system, with applicants being placed in one of five bands A to E according to their housing need.

- 5.2 There are 3,000 applicants on the Housing Register, of which 2,827 are active and able to bid for vacancies. The remaining 173 are registered pending verification documentation before being made active. The following table sets out the Housing Register by band and size of accommodation required.

Band	Bedist/1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed	Total
A	1	0	1	0	0	2
B	67	53	37	87	43	287
C	200	136	256	74	10	676
D	835	97	12	2	0	946
E	543	237	122	10	4	916
Total	1646	523	428	173	15	2827

- 5.3 The new scheme is generally working well. Applicants report that the system is straightforward to use. Adverts showing empty housing association properties are advertised weekly and bidding activity is consistently high. Since the go-live of BFC My Choice, properties have been advertised, with an average bids made each week, depending on the types of property available. Three bedroom houses attract the highest number of bids.
- 5.4 In addition to vacant properties, the results of bidding activity from previous weeks are also made public. The Outcomes Report shows applicants which properties have been let, how many bids there were for the property, the band and effective date of the successful applicant and whether the applicant was a Bracknell Forest resident. Applicants report that they do look at these reports to gauge their relative position and chances of rehousing, although the reality is that applicants tend to use this information to express dissatisfaction with their relative position and many question whether they have any real prospect of rehousing. A specific area of dissatisfaction expressed by applicants is that they don't progress beyond their current band, regardless of the time they spend on the housing register.

Out of Borough Applicants

- 5.5 While the new Allocations Policy generally works well, the policy relating to out of borough applicants is not operating as expected. Housing Legislation requires the Housing Register to be open to anyone over the age of 16 years, unless they come within the "ineligible" categories set out in the Homelessness Act 2002. The Council's current policy is that:
- 5.6 Applicants are placed into one of five bands on the basis of their housing circumstances. Priority for a property is awarded on the basis of:
- The applicant in the highest band (A-E)
 - Within each band, priority is given firstly to applicants who are resident in the borough and secondly by date of placement in the band. In cases where an applicant has 2 or more children, those with different genders where one is

over 10 years will be prioritised ahead of those with younger children or children of the same gender.

Current Position

- 5.7 There are currently 439 applicants on the housing register who are living outside the borough. The following table shows the relative priority of these applicants and the size of accommodation required:

Band	Bed Size					Total
	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+bed	
A	0	0	0	0	0	0
B	3	1	7	12	5	28
C	65	16	20	14	1	116
D	105	9	1	0	0	115
E	116	41	21	2	0	180
Total	289	67	49	28	6	439

- 5.8 Bidding activity indicates that out of borough applicants are actively seeking re-housing in the area and are featuring among the top proportion of bidding shortlists. The 28 out of borough applicants in band B will always out bid long standing in-borough applicants in bands C-E, and of particular concern is the number of out of borough applicants seeking three and four bedroom properties. These are the properties that are in highest demand from in-borough applicants.
- 5.9 Prior to BFC My Choice, the only out of borough applicants offered accommodation were older applicants willing to accept low demand properties.
- 5.10 It is proposed that the order of priority for selecting an applicant for a property is amended and be awarded on the basis of:
- Local connection followed by;
 - The applicant in the highest band (A-E). Within each band, priority is given to applicants according to the date of placement in the band. In cases where an applicant has 2 or more children, those with different genders where one is over 10 years will be prioritised ahead of those with younger children or children of the same gender.

Out of borough applicants will be considered on a case by case basis to identify whether a local connection with the borough can be established.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 It is permissible to have a policy which gives priority to Bracknell Forest applicants. Any change in policy should not be rigid and applied inflexibly to out of Borough applicants. All applicants will be considered on their individual merits.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 There are no significant financial implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 An Equalities Impact assessment is attached to this report

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 An applicant may challenge the Councils Allocations policy by seeking a judicial review. The Council will need to be able to demonstrate that the specific circumstances of the case have been considered and taken into account, and that a blanket policy has not been applied.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Extensive consultation was undertaken during the development of the initial My Choice Allocations Policy. This report seeks to amend an area of the policy which is not operating as initially intended. Further consultation has therefore not been undertaken.

Background Papers

BFC My Choice Allocation Policy

Contact for further information

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