

**REPORT OF: HOUSING, HEALTH & ENGINEERING MANAGER**

**TO: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**DATES: 16<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2020**

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## **Proposed Revised B-with-us Allocations Policy**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To advise Policy & Resources Committee of the proposed revised B-with-us Allocations Policy which will be consulted upon between 13<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. That, subject to only minor changes being made to the allocations policy following consultation, Policy & Resources Committee agree to give delegated authority to the Chief Executive to confirm the Council's acceptance of the new allocations policy.

### **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3. To ensure that the B-with-us partnership continues to operate an allocations policy that is fully compliant with the legal and regulatory framework for the allocation of social housing.

### **ISSUE**

The Council is a partner of the B-with-us sub-regional choice-based lettings scheme which is used to allocate the vast majority of social rented housing across Pennine Lancashire ie Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale.

Periodically, the Allocations Policy is reviewed and following initial external legal scrutiny of the current policy, a number of changes were recommended. The B-with-us Steering Group, of which the Council has representation through the Housing Needs Manager, has since completed a full review of the allocations policy and the proposed, revised policy (Appendix 1) is being subjected to consultation via a [survey](#) from 13<sup>th</sup> December 2019 until 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

Following consultation, responses will be considered to ascertain if any amendments to the proposed policy are required. Following this process, the policy will be finalised and each partner will be asked to approve the new policy.

In anticipation of relatively minor changes being made to the proposed policy, it is requested that Policy & Resources Committee give delegated authority to the Chief Executive to confirm the Councils acceptance of the new policy. Assuming ratification by all partners, it would be expected that the new policy would commence on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 or shortly thereafter.

## **Proposed changes to the policy**

The proposed changes are highlighted in Appendix 2, which includes:-

**Local connection** – introduction of a local connection criteria in order to qualify to join the register

**Housing-related debt** – greater clarity in terms of how housing debts owed will be considered under the scheme

**Homeowners** - this is a new policy intended to help ensure best use of stock by only allocating to those persons who are unable to secure alternative accommodation, thus applicants who have equity in a property of at least £120,000 will be disqualified from joining the housing register.

**Deliberate worsening of circumstances** - This is a new policy and intended to ensure that applicants do not deliberately worsen their circumstances in order to be awarded higher priority.

**Suspensions** - greater clarity in terms of eligibility and qualification criteria

**Banding changes** – rearrangement of some of the criteria within bands to ensure that those in a reasonable preference category continue to receive sufficient priority. This includes the addition of a fifth band and the ending of cumulative need.

**Armed forces** – There are no proposed changes to applicants who are currently serving or former members of the UK Armed Forces (or a member of their household who is moving with them). Such applicants will continue to receive ‘additional priority’ ie their effective date (the date they moved into that band) will be over-ridden so they appear at the top of their band on shortlists.

## **Impact of the proposed changes to the allocations policy**

Appendix 2, page 9 – 12, also highlights the impact of these changes. In implementing the recommendations made by external legal advice, significant changes are required and unfortunately many applicants will see their banding lower as a result. However, the over-riding priority is that the new allocations policy is fully compliant with the legal and regulatory framework for the allocation of social housing.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Policy**

7. The Council, as a partner in the B-with-us scheme, would consider the new allocations policy as its own policy for allocating social housing.

### **Financial**

8. As a result of the proposed changes to the current allocations policy, the B-with-us database will need to be reconfigured significantly, which will mean substantial additional cost. However, these costs will be met through reserves held by the B-with-us partnership, and therefore no additional funding from the Council will be required.

## **Legal**

9. Failure to update the current allocations policy risks the potential for legal challenge.

## **Risk Management**

10. If the Council does not agree to the proposed revised allocations policy and as a result, there is a delay to updating the allocations policy, there is risk of legal challenge against the allocations policy and potential subsequent loss of reputation / financial penalty for the Council as a partner in the scheme.

## **Health and Safety:**

11. There are no known health and safety issues for the Council arising from this report

## **Sustainability:**

12. The policy changes are aimed at ensuring a continued fair and legal system for the allocation of social housing in the Pennine Lancashire area.

## **Community Safety:**

13. There are no known community safety issues for the Council arising from this report.

## **Equality and Diversity:**

14. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken by B-with-us regarding the proposed allocations policy.

## **APPENDICES –**

**Appendix 1 – Proposed B-with-us Allocations Policy**

**Appendix 2 – B-with-us Allocations Policy Review**