

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

20TH JUNE 2022

Title: Report of the working group on Housing Allocations

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Paul Rivers, Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing (Operations)

Head of Service: Andrew Smith, Head of Housing Delivery & Communities

Key Decision: No

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

- 1.1 To inform Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (henceforth 'the Committee') of the findings of the Working Group on Housing Allocations.
- 1.2 To ask the Committee to consider and endorse the Working Group's recommendations.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees the report included as Annexe 1 and commends its recommendations to the Executive.
- 2.2 The Working Group's recommendations which this Committee is asked to endorse are:
 - 1. The Council should keep the income threshold at £60,000 per annum and the savings threshold at £30,000. However, this should be reviewed by the Resources Overview and Scrutiny committee or another appropriate O&S committee within 12-18 months.
 - 2. Establish a process to signpost applicants who are unable to join the housing register due to the income or savings threshold to Affordable Home Ownership Schemes notably shared ownership.
 - 3. Maintain the existing position that children will only be accommodated in one home even if a 50/50 residence arrangement exists. An exception will be made if there is a court order in place requiring this or if Surrey County Council Children's Services (or an equivalent organisation elsewhere) provide compelling evidence that a second home is required.
 - 4. Only housing related debts such as rent arrears and deposit scheme debts should be taken into account when considering eligibility for inclusion on

the housing register and allocation of housing. Other debts such as council tax or housing benefit overpayments would be disregarded for this purpose.

5. Given the administrative burden in checking debts and that the average time someone is on the register is 2-3 years, it makes sense that checks at application stage are more light touch given an applicant's debts status can change so much over time.
6. Establish a process by which the Housing Options team signpost applicants unable to join the housing needs register due to debts to local debt advice charities.
7. The Chair of the Housing Allocations Group and the Chair of Resources Overview and Scrutiny to write a joint letter the Secretary of State for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities to reiterate the need for the importance of ensuring the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates properly reflect rents in Farnham.

3. Reason for the recommendation

To ensure the Council let homes to tenants in a fair, transparent and efficient way, through a robust Allocation Scheme to address the housing need within the borough.

4. Background

- 4.1 In 2019, the Housing O&S scrutiny review '[Attitudes to Council Housing: Pride or Prejudice](#)' recommended that a review was undertaken of the Council's Allocation Policy, to ensure an easy application process for all eligible residents, including local workers, and more representative demand data is collected, and the Council should expand and develop its communication on allocation criteria to better educate members of the public on who is eligible for social housing.
- 4.2 In 2020, the Housing Strategy and Enabling Team commissioned an affordability and housing need study which has provided up to date local information to inform the allocation scheme.
- 4.3 In September 2021, the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee adopted a [scoping document](#) and agreed the membership for the group conducting the present review. Following the subsequent reconfiguration of Waverley's scrutiny arrangements, the Resources Overview and Scrutiny committee has adopted the role as the parent committee for this review.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

The Corporate Strategy makes the delivery of *“good quality housing for all income levels and age groups”* a strategic priority. To reflect this, Objective 2 of the Housing Delivery and Communities Service Plan 2021-2024 is *“preventing homelessness and meeting housing needs, including needs for supported accommodation and housing for older people.”*

6. Implications of decision

6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)

The Working Group took the amount of available Council Housing as a given.

As discussed in Annexe 1, recommendations #4 and #5 aim to reduce the staff resource required to administer the allocations process.

6.2 Risk management

If implemented, recommendations #4 would likely lead to additional people joining the housing register. Therefore, this would potentially lead to a longer wait for others on the register.

These recommendations might also reduce the incentive for applicants to repay other debts to the Council or allow applicants with a greater tendency not to pay debts to take up tenancies with the Council. Either scenario could potentially have an impact on the Council's finances. However, during their investigations, the members of the Working Group found no evidence to indicate these scenarios were likely and satisfied themselves that the Council had alternative tools to recover debts and prevent rent arrears.

6.3 Legal

There are no direct legal implications from this report.

6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed to reflect the likely impact of implementing recommendation #4. Council tax arrears appear to disproportionately affect those with a number of protected characteristics. Therefore, this recommendation is likely to have a positive impact in terms of allowing equal access to council housing.

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

These recommendations do not have direct climate emergency implications.

7. Consultation and engagement

The Task and Finish group consulted local voluntary groups with practical experience of assisting applicants to join the housing register.

8. Other options considered

These are discussed within Annexe 1.

9. Governance journey

If accepted by the Committee, then the recommendations and the attached report will go on to Executive in July 2022.

Annexe:

Annexe 1 – Report from the Housing Allocations Task and Finish Group (Resources Overview & Scrutiny)

Annexe 2 – Equality Impacts Assessment for the Housing Allocations Task and Finish Group

Background Papers

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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