

Housing and Health Committee	
Meeting Date	7 th March 2023
Report Title	Housing Allocations Policy Review and Temporary Suspension of Housing Register
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
Lead Officer	Zoe Callaway
Key Decision	No
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To agree that the current Housing Allocations Policy remains in place, based upon the review undertaken. 2. To note the temporary suspension of the Housing Register for one month and the arrangements put in place for vulnerable households.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the background to the Housing Allocations Policy and seeks approval for the current policy to remain in place. It also provides the committee with an update on the changes to the housing register software and impacts of the process during June 2023.

2 Background

Housing Allocations Policy Review

- 2.1 The current Allocations Policy was adopted in November 2020. Prior to this the Policy had last been amended in 2013. A review of the Policy has been conducted to ensure it is legally compliant and to ensure the changes implemented in 2020 had the intended impact.
- 2.2 The current Policy is still lawful in terms of statute, statutory guidance, and case law.
- 2.3 The Policy is being brought before Committee to review whether it has met the objectives set out when it was adopted. There were changes to both the qualification criteria and banding reasons.

- 2.4 The residency requirement was reduced to 2 years continuous residence. Employment in Swale was also included for all applicants regardless of tenure rather than just social housing tenants. There were concerns that this would result in an increased demand on the register. Based on applications at the time of the policy change it was estimated that this increase would be 11% of applicants who did not qualify under the 2013 Policy would qualify under the 2020 Policy. It was agreed that new applications would be assessed against both Policies to monitor the impact. For applications received between November 2020 and November 2022, 8% did not qualify under the 2013 Policy but did qualify under the 2020 Policy.
- 2.5 The 2013 Policy had resulted in an imbalance in distribution of applicants in the Bands which were at that time A to D.
- 2.6 To address the imbalance the 2020 Policy increased the banding priority for households with a main housing duty owed by Swale borough Council, households with disabled children who were lacking bedrooms and households who required a property that is or can be adapted using a Disabled Facilities Grant. These households were increased from Band C to Band B.
- 2.7 The change in qualification led to an increase which is just under the predicted percentage and was considered acceptable when recommending the 2020 Policy. No change to the qualification criteria is suggested at this review.
- 2.8 The increase in banding reasons in Band B has led to a more balanced register and more lets to households in the most housing need. No change to the banding reasons is suggested at this review.
- 2.9 The Policy will be continued to be reviewed in line with any changes in statute, statutory guidance and case law and brought back to committee should it require updating to reflect any changes in the future.

Temporary Suspension of Housing Register

- 2.10 Swale's housing register and housing option case management is managed through software procured by Kent Homechoice (KHC). KHC is a partnership of 13 Local Authorities, 28 Housing Associations and Kent County Council (KCC) set up to provide a Kent wide choice-based lettings system. The lead authority is Dover District Council (DDC).
- 2.11 The contract for the software that operates Kent Homechoice and our housing options system was due for renewal and DDC as lead authority have undertaken a procurement exercise to identify a new supplier for the software.
- 2.12 In July 2022 Cabinet at DCC approved the award of the contract for the Kent wide housing options system to Huume. This new contract was signed and put in place with Huume on 17th September 2022. The contract with our current system provider finishes at the end of July 2023. Work is progressing to have the new system in place ahead of this contract end date.

- 2.13 So that the housing register and housing options systems can be moved from the old system to the Huume system, it is necessary to temporarily suspend the housing register for a period of one month. To ensure the safe transfer of data and management of housing register requests.
- 2.14 Property adverts can be prepared on the Huume system from 16th June ready to be advertised on 1st July. This means that there will only be a two-week period where properties cannot be advertised.
- 2.15 If clients approach the housing register team and are considered to be vulnerable and in a high housing need, it will be possible for their applications to be added manually to the Huume system during the period that the housing register is closed.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To agree that the current Housing Allocations Policy remains in place, based upon the review undertaken.
- 3.2 To note the temporary suspension of the Housing Register for one month and the arrangements put in place for vulnerable households.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 Changes are made to the Housing Allocations Policy; this is not recommended as the current policy review has concluded that it is legally compliant, and the changes made in 2020 have provided a more balanced register for those in the greatest housing need.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 None

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Priority 1: Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone
Financial, Resource and Property	The current housing register provides increase banding to those that the Council owes a main duty to, this enables more housing options to these clients and will directly impact the costs of Temporary Accommodation.

Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Statutory guidance and case law has been considered as part of the review process. The procurement of the new software has followed public procurement regulations by DDC as lead authority.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	Health needs are considered as part of the housing register criteria.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	Equality Impact Assessment was prepared for 2020 Policy. Support will be available to manually accept and input applications from high priority/vulnerable customers who need to apply to join the Housing Register during the period of temporary suspension.
Privacy and Data Protection	A joint Data Protection Impact Assessment has been completed for Kent and Medway Councils. The Data Protection Impact Assessment will ensure that the transfer of the housing register to a new provider will be compliant with the data protection principles and that any risks are mitigated. We will work with the existing and new provider to ensure that secure data migration takes place.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

None

8 Background Papers

Housing Allocations Policy - [Microsoft Word - Allocations policy 2020 Final \(swale.gov.uk\)](#)

Record of decision from Dover District Council to award contract of the Kent Homechoice and Housing Options system to Huume -

<https://moderngov.dover.gov.uk/ielssueDetails.aspx?IId=23447&PlanId=0&Opt=3#A119907>