

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	6 October 2021
Subject:	Homeseeker Plus Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy
Report of:	Head of Community Services
Corporate Lead:	Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Housing
Number of Appendices:	Two

Executive Summary:

Homeseeker Plus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with social housing landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

The seven local authorities are Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

Demand for affordable social housing within the Homeseeker Plus area is very high and not all demand will be able to be met from the available social housing resources. Only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the Homeseeker Plus scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to advise on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.

The policy explains who is eligible and qualifying to apply on Homeseeker Plus and sets out how applications will be assessed based on housing need.

Due to legislative and other changes the policy is in need of a refresh. It is considered good practice for the partnership to consult the public and associated stakeholders on the new policy. The consultation is complete and a final version has been produced.

The appendices to this report contain the final policy and a summary of the responses to consultation.

Recommendation:

Subject to any amendments from the Executive Committee the refreshed Homeseeker Plus Policy is RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL for adoption in early 2022 at the management board's discretion which Tewkesbury Borough Council is a member.

Reasons for Recommendation:

To ensure an open, transparent and fair process to changes in policy is completed.

Resource Implications:

The implementation of the new policy will be met within current resources.

Legal Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

Risk Management Implications:

Not approving the policy consultation would mean that Tewkesbury Borough Council would be out of step with the rest of the Homeseeker Plus partnership and would be treating its clients in a different way to other partners.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The final policy will be presented to each district Council or Cabinet to enable implementation in 2022.

Environmental Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Homeseeker Plus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by seven local authorities in partnership with the majority of Social Housing Landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire which enables Social Housing Landlords to advertise their homes and for applicants to bid for properties they are interested in.
- 1.2** To compliment the scheme, and ensure compliance with legislation, local strategies and policies and the Statutory Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation a Homeseeker Plus policy has been implemented.
- 1.3** Other than a major change to the Homeseeker policy in 2016 to include West Oxfordshire District Council into the partnership and a name change to "Homeseeker Plus" there have previously only been minor alterations to the policy.
- 1.4** This has led to 'policy drift' with it being interpreted and applied differently across the partnership. Therefore to remove ambiguity, add clarity and also include the provision for accredited private landlords to advertise their properties a new policy is being proposed.

2.0 CONSULTATION

- 2.1** The policy that was previously approved by Executive Committee was opened to public consultation in early 2021. Forest of Dean District Council coordinated the consultation on behalf of the partnership.
- 2.2** The consultation ran from 1 February 2021 for a period of eight weeks, ending on 29 March 2021. In total there were 232 responses. The consultation was publicised to all 19,000 applicants who are registered on Homeseeker plus, housing providers and Councils. It was also publicised via social media platforms and on the Homeseeker Plus website.

- 2.3** The overall responses were positive to the suggested changes with respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Detailed responses to the consultation can be found in Appendix 2.

3.0 CHANGES POST CONSULTATION

- 3.1** The proposed major changes to the policy were approved by Executive Committee in October 2019 prior to consultation.

- 3.2** Two further changes are as follows:

Point 4.35 – *‘For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome urgent physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.’*

The word *urgent* has been added in.

6.13 – *‘If there is an occasion where two or more applicants have the same band start date and application date, the Social Housing Landlord will make a decision which applicant best meets the aims and objectives of Homeseekerplus.’*

This was removed as it is not a policy position but a system process and therefore not required within the policy. It has not been a known issue in the last 12 years of the partnership and by not having it as policy it allows flexibility for the Local Authorities and Registered Providers to use their discretion to ensure properties go to those most in need.

- 3.3** There are a number of other minor changes to the policy which are to address spelling, punctuation and grammar or in relation to presentation. The final policy wording with these changes can be found in Appendix 1. Some formatting updates are still required.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1** In order to ensure an open, transparent and fair process to changes in Policy there are no other alternative options.

5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- 5.1** Interim Housing strategy - 2021-2022.

6.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- 6.1** Laying the foundations: a housing strategy for England 2011.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

- 7.1** The consultation and implementation of the new policy will be met within current resources.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

- 8.1** None arising directly from this report.

9.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

9.1 None arising directly from this report.

10.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

10.1 None arising directly from this report.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices: 1 - Homeseeker Plus policy for adoption.
2 – Consultation outcomes.