

APPENDIX B

Part 1 – Evaluation of responses to the consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy 2023

Part 2 - Demographic information from consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy

Part 1 – Evaluation of responses to the consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy with background information

1. Proposed change one - Assessment of housing need

Point for consideration - Should we only accept applicants onto the Housing Register if they have a housing need? Those applicants defined as having a housing need or reasonable preference are shown in 3.2 of this report.

Current Policy - Applicants who are deemed as having no housing need in housing law are currently able to join the Housing Register and are given a priority banding according to their circumstances. This includes those adequately housed in the private rented sector or applicants without children living with family. In cases where there is no overcrowding or medical requirement for example, the banding would be low and the chances of securing accommodation slim.

Recommended Change - Under the proposed new policy, applicants without a housing need could not join the Housing Register. Those applicants currently in band D with a one bedroom need and all applicants in Band E are likely to be ineligible to join the Housing Register when the new policy is introduced. Those in band F would not qualify and not be able to join the register. Of the 4000 Housing applicants, this will affect approximately 2500 applicants. This will predominately be those currently in Band D with a one bedroom need and those in Band F who are currently unable to bid.

For some context, in 2022/2023 0 applicants from band E secured through choice based lettings. Within band D, 18 applicants with a one bedroom need secured and there was one family with a two bedroom need that secured through choice based lettings, which was selected due to the previously applied quota. In 2021/2022 only two applicants from band E secured a studio and a one bedroom property. Within band D in 2021/2022 19 applicants with a one bedroom need and four with a two bedroom need secured properties.

Whilst the figures show a high proportion of those currently on the register will be excluded if only those with a housing need are eligible, it is notable that within our last review, those not bidding for over two years included 1478 applications with 956 in band D or E with a one bedroom need. This would suggest that their housing need wasn't as pressing as those regularly bidding for properties.

Question asked - "Do you agree that we should only accept applicants onto the Housing Register if they have a housing need?"

Responses -

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	125	62%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other means of accommodation (Private rent (PRS)/mortgage) are perceived to be unaffordable or unstable (35 of 78 – 44%) <i>This also featured in social media comments</i> • Everyone in Stevenage should have access to affordable housing/go on the register (26 of 78 – 33%) <i>There was a theme here of wanting children of tenants to be housed and also those who are “hard working”</i> • People should be able to go onto the register to future proof against changes in circumstances (<10%) • Other notable comments were <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support for building more homes - <i>also featured on social media</i> ○ Support for “time points” - <i>this was a feature of the previous scheme, no longer a “waiting list” but register of need</i> ○ Support for five years (or more) in Stevenage eligibility criteria
New consultation	233	74%	<p>Repeated themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should be allowed in case circumstances changes - PRS/Mortgage perceived to be unaffordable/unstable - Everyone should have the “right” - Support for “time points” - Support for building more homes
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members supported the change to ensure that social housing is allocated to those most in need.

Further considerations - Officers considered adding an additional ‘Housing Options’ band to the Housing Register for those without a recognised housing need. Staffing resource would be required to offer these applicants support and advice to create an Accommodation Options Plan.

Members consulted commented that creating this additional band would unfairly give applicants the impression that they are eligible to bid for social housing.

A key statutory function of the Housing Options team is to offer housing advice and support. This is not limited to those facing homelessness.

Proposed changed to be included in new policy - Yes

2. Proposed change two – Disqualification in relation to finances

Point for consideration - Should those with sufficient savings or income be disqualified from applying for social housing?

Current Policy - does not take income from benefits or wages into account when assessing housing need. Only savings in relation to the sale of a house are considered, with a current amount of £16,00 allowed from a sale within the last ten years.

Recommended Change - Only those who cannot afford to house themselves by other means through their current financial resources would be eligible for social housing.

There would be some exceptions, for example applicants wishing to go into sheltered housing.

Question asked – Do you agree that those with sufficient savings or income should be disqualified from applying for social housing?

Responses -

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	124	61%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even with savings/high earnings, other means of accommodation (PRS/mortgage) believed to be unaffordable (15 of 80 – 19%) • Having high income or savings shouldn't exclude people from the register (8 of 80 – 10%) • Even split between those who felt it should be based on income but not savings and those that support savings but not income (approx. 10% for each) • There were concerns about circumstances changing and whether other debts would be taken into account (9 of 80 – 11%) <i>This also featured on social media</i> • There were concerns that it would penalise people for working hard or discourage employment (10 of 80 – 13%) • Support for five year tenancy to allow people to save for a deposit • Other notable comments were <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support for an affordable buying or low start shared ownership scheme ○ Concern about the administrative cost

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suggestion to not exclude but award lower priority ○ More information needed before they can support it ● Suggestions for thresholds included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Savings £10K - £100K ○ Whatever is needed to get a mortgage (deposit) (2) ○ Only savings from house sale within 10 years ○ Income over £30K - £100K
New consultation	202	64%	<p>Repeated themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception that even with savings/income PRS/mortgage unaffordable - Concerns that it will put people off working
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	<p>Members noted that any kind of means testing would be extremely resource intensive. Financial assessments would be required for applicants joining the register and before being offered a property to take account of changing circumstances. Also that the ever changing cost of living crisis would impact what the council deemed “affordable” and this would constantly need to be reviewed.</p>

Further considerations - Implement financial assessments alongside a new Allocation Policy will require additional staffing resources at a time when savings to the Housing Revenue Account are required.

Proposed changed to be included in new policy – No

However, this could be reconsidered as part of the review after the policy has been implemented for a year.

3. Proposed change three - New Generation Scheme

Point for consideration - Should Stevenage Borough Council introduce a New Generation Scheme, for single people and couples without children (who meet set criteria) to be given a one bedroom or studio home through the allocation of a yearly quota?

Current Policy - There isn't currently a scheme of this kind in Stevenage.

Recommended Change - This change would introduce a scheme to give single people and couples living with their parents in Stevenage access to a proportion of studio and one

bedroom homes which would be set aside especially for them. They would not need to have any other need, beyond being an adult, sharing with family. This recognises that this group of people in Stevenage have limited choices for being able to live independently.

Question asked “Do you agree that SBC should introduce a New Generation scheme?”

Responses -

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	181	89%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House those on the list first (6 out of 22 – 27%) • Young people should stay at home and save for a deposit (27%) • Doesn't take finances into account – <i>if financial eligibility criteria accepted, will resolve</i> • Other notable comments – that the current scheme is adequate and this is considered “queue jumping”, requests for more information before they could agree
New consultation	278	89%	Overall very positive as before (“best idea here”) with the same theme that this group could afford to PRS/buy Notable concerns about whether there is enough stock to facilitate this
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members noted that the question was not specific enough in terms of offering this scheme to children of all residents regardless of tenure as opposed to council tenants only. This would explain the high level of support during consultation.

Further considerations – Offering the scheme to adult children of all tenures would attract a high number of applicants. This would need to be balanced with the probability of securing accommodation. Offering the scheme to assist children of council tenants only would help relieve overcrowding in council family homes, help under-occupiers to downsize and make best use of stock by improving movement to more suitable accommodation.

If all of the proposed changes to this policy are implemented, housing register applicants requiring one bedroom or studio properties is likely to drop from the current 2203 to under 500. However, in the last year only 17 studios and 46 one bedroom properties were let, which indicates that stock levels aren't sufficient to support a new Generation Scheme.

Proposed changed to be included in new policy – No

Close monitoring of the impact of the policy during the first year of implementation may lead to this proposal being reconsidered as part of the review.

4. Proposed change four – Reduction of priority bands

Point for consideration - Should the number of bands that applications can be placed into be reduced?

Current Policy - Our current policy has six priority bandings, covering a number of different circumstances.

- A – Urgent medical factors
- B – Very high priority
- C – High priority
- D - Medium priority
- E – Low priority
- F – No priority

Recommended Change - The proposed new policy includes three bands:

1 – Urgent priority statutory housing need to move. Includes:

- emergency medical or disability need where the applicant is suffering life threatening conditions and need an immediate move which may be to facilitate hospital discharge
- the applicant's condition is life threatening and the applicant's existing accommodation is a major contributory factor
- where an applicant's condition is expected to be terminal within a period of twelve months and rehousing is required for the provision of suitable care
- where overcrowding in the property leaves the applicant at risk of life-threatening infection.
- care leavers assessed as ready to move-on and all support services are in place for the transition to living independently
- residents of dwellings subject to a prohibition order, where problems cannot be resolved within six months and continuing to occupy will pose a considerable risk to the applicant's health
- statutory overcrowding or severe overcrowding by 3 bedrooms or more as defined by the bedroom standard in section 4 of the policy
- Armed Forces with an urgent housing need and have no access to other accommodation
- Applicants freeing up significantly adapted social housing where another applicant is assessed as in need of those adaptations.

2 – High priority statutory housing need to move. Includes:

- homeless applicants owed the main housing duty (no allocations eligibility criteria required)
- homeless applicants owed a relief duty and considered likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless and accommodated in interim temporary accommodation (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- pregnant applicants or those with children who are sharing a home with family or friends who meet the eligibility criteria of the Allocation Policy, are owed a homelessness prevention duty that has ended and has been allowed to stay at home for at least a year whilst they bid for social housing

- the applicant has severe, long term medical conditions and is living in accommodation assessed as being highly unsuitable and is directly detrimental to their health
- council tenants moving to a smaller property releasing high demand accommodation
- overcrowding by 2 bedrooms as defined by the bedroom standard in section 4 of the policy
- statutory or discretionary successors to a tenancy required to move to a smaller property
- private sector tenants living in a property that the council has determined poses a serious category 1 hazard under the Health and Safety fitness rating and the assessing officer is satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within 6 months.

3 – Lower priority statutory housing need to move. Includes:

- applicants where the homelessness relief duty has ended and has been assessed as intentionally homeless (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants owed the homelessness main duty where the prevention or relief duty was brought to an end due to non-cooperation (no allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants owed a relief duty and not considered likely to be in priority need (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants owed a prevention duty and not considered likely to be in priority need (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- homeless applicants where the relief duty has been brought to an end but not in priority need and therefore not owed a main homelessness duty (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants who meet the criteria for Independent Living.
- Applicants ready to move on from council accredited supported housing schemes, as detailed in appendix 6 of the policy.
- Former regular armed forces applicants not meeting the legal requirement for additional preference but meet the criteria set out in section 5 of the policy.

All of the groups included in each band are detailed in appendix A, the Allocation policy, section 5.

Question asked “Do you agree that the number of bands that applicants can be placed into should be reduced?”

Responses -

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	159	78%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate as they are (12 of 44 – 27%) • Support for still applying a priority banding • Suggestion to only remove Band F • Suggestion to return to “time waiting” points, as in the old

			<p>scheme (9%) <i>This was a theme throughout.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other notable comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suggestions to increase the number of bands ○ Concern it would increase “waiting times” ○ More guidance/information needed
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members agreed that fewer bands would be easier for applicants to understand and suggested the use of numbers rather than letters to avoid confusion.

Further considerations – Changing the banding is an opportunity to re-communicate about the housing register and manage expectations. Changing to numbers would avoid applicants comparing to the previous bands and interpreting their position incorrectly.

Proposed changed to be included in new policy – Yes

5. Proposed change five – Removal of applicants who have not submitted a bid in a year.

Point for consideration - Should applicants who haven’t placed a bid in 12 months be removed from the housing register?

Current Policy - The current policy allows applicants to stay on the register even when they are not actively bidding for homes that become available under Choice Based Lettings. Applicants who have not bid for two years or more are placed into Band F and their application put on hold for six months.

Recommended Change - Applicants who have not bid within the last 12 months, without good reason, would have their application removed from the Housing Register and they would not be allowed to bid for homes, unless they applied again and would be given a new start date. Allowances would be made where applicants have good reason for choosing not to bid for suitable homes or suitable homes haven’t become available.

Question asked “Do you agree that applicants who haven’t placed a bid in 12 months should be removed from the register?”

Responses –

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
<i>Original consultation</i>	151	75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns where there haven’t been suitable homes available (13 of 51 – 25%) - <i>We will mitigate this by communicating with applicants before removing them</i>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion to find out why and allow for legitimate reasons (8 of 51 – 16%) - <i>As above</i> • Allow people to stay on in case their circumstances change (12%) • Other notable comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Just simply disagreeing ○ Concerns it would push people to bid for homes they don't want ○ Suggestions that it should be either shorter (3 months) or longer (18 months) ○ Support for the return of "time points"
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members agreed in principle, provided applicants are given sufficient information on how to bid and exceptions are made for those who have not been able to bid for good reason or that suitable properties haven't been available.

Further considerations – Asking applicants to re-register each year was considered, but generally deemed to be an unnecessary burden on applicants and officers to process.

Officers will ensure that sufficient communication is made with applicants to avoid anyone being unfairly affected.

Proposed changed to be included in new policy – Yes

6. Proposed change six – Removing “sharing” letting of new homes between the bands

Point for consideration - This change removes the practice introduced by the 2014 Allocations Policy review that ensures applicants across bands A to E get a share of the homes available to let each year via a quota system. This means that not all properties are let to those most in need.

Current Policy - The current policy ensures that applicants across bands A to E get a share of the homes available to let each year via a quota system. The quota is on the website and broken down in the table <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/council-housing-in-stevenage>

Band	Priority	Quota % of lettings
A	Urgent priority	0.50%
B	Very high priority	34%
C	High priority	22%
D	Medium priority	29%
E	Low priority	0.50%
F	No priority	0%

Total		86%
Transfers no preference / direct lets		10%
Temporary accommodation		4%

Recommended Change - To remove the quota and award housing based on housing need only.

A proportion of homes will still be offered on a direct let basis each year to specific applicants, for example those moving on from temporary accommodation, having to move from their home in an emergency or needing specific aids and adaptations. An annual statement will outline the percentage of properties to be allocated to these groups.

Question asked “Do you agree that we should let homes based on housing need only, removing the sharing between bands?”

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	150	75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current system is fair (13 of 51 – 25%) • Concerns that certain groups of people will never be offered a home • Support for more house building • Support for time points – <i>as before</i>
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members agreed that it is not acceptable for those with lower priority to take priority over those applicants with higher housing needs.

Proposed changed to be included in new policy – Yes

7. Proposed change seven - Bedroom standard changes

Point for consideration - Should the bedroom standard be changed to allow for more household members to share, without requiring their own bedroom?

Current Policy - The current policy says that you are **not** overcrowded if you have

- One bedroom for every adult couple (including civil partners)
- One bedroom for every adult aged 16 or over (including lodgers or boarders)
- One bedroom for any two children of the same sex under age 16
- One bedroom for any two children regardless of their sex under age 10
- One bedroom for any other child

Recommended Change - The consultation proposed that anyone who has the following, is **not** overcrowded

- One bedroom for applicant and partner/spouse (if any)
- One bedroom for any additional adult couple
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the same sex
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the opposite sex aged nine and under
- One bedroom for any additional person

To give an example, in the current policy, two brothers aged 16 and 17 would need a bedroom each, under this proposed change, they could share. Exceptions such as when someone needs their own bedroom owing to medical conditions would apply.

Question asked “Do you agree that the bedroom standard should be changed to allow for more household members to share, without requiring their own bedroom?”

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	114	56%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs to be a consideration of age (22 of 88 – 25%) – <i>Agreed, we need to specify that anyone over the age of 21 needs their own bedroom</i> Concerns that homes aren’t large enough to have privacy (16%) Every child needs their own bedroom (13%) Support for building new homes or extending existing ones Concerns that it doesn’t solve housing issues by making the change – <i>this is accurate, although it is hoped the most overcrowded will be moved first</i>
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members did not support the proposal made in the consultation. The main objective that adults of the same sex would be forced to share a bedroom. Members supported the amendments made to the proposal that ensure that children of the opposite sex over age 10 and adults of the same sex are eligible for their own bedroom.

Further considerations and proposed change following consultation – A revised bedroom standard has been included in the proposed policy. This takes into account responses to the consultation and advice from Members that the policy addresses the issue of overcrowding across the borough and recognises that children of the opposite sex over age 10 and adults of the same sex require their own bedroom.

The following bedroom standard has been included in the proposed new policy:

- One bedroom for applicant and partner/spouse (if any)
- One bedroom for any additional adult couple
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the same sex (up to the age of 18)
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the opposite sex under age 10
- One bedroom for any additional person (aged 18 or over)

In addition to the changes to the bedroom standard above, it is also proposed that the current practice of allowing families with two young children to secure three bedroom properties will be removed in order to meet the immediate demand of overcrowded families. During 2021/2022, 44 three bedroom properties were let. Of these 21 (~48%) would be only eligible for a two bedroom property according to the proposed new Allocation Policy, eight of which had received priority as they were homeless applicants with main duty accepted. During 2022/2023, 52 three bedroom properties were let. Of these 29 (~56%) would be only eligible for a two bedroom property according to the proposed new Allocation Policy, 20 of which had received priority as they were homeless applicants with main duty accepted. Over ten offers of two bedroom properties were let to applicants in band C with two children under the age of 6, which indicates that those applicants in band B, often in temporary accommodation, are selectively bidding.

Removing the practice of allowing applicants with a two bedroom need to secure three bedroom properties, is likely to increase demand for two bedroom properties going forward. However, the proposed new policy will positively impact those council tenants currently in two bedroom properties, who are genuinely overcrowded such as with two children of opposite gender or with three children. Those applicants will receive priority and when they move, the movement of properties will lead to the housing needs of multiple applicants being met.

Another positive impact of removing this practice would be that tenants with a two bedroom need who are eligible for three bedroom properties according to the current policy, who mutually exchanging to another property and are therefore eligible for properties with one extra bedroom, would no longer be eligible to exchange into four bedroom properties. This would ensure that larger households are more likely to exchange into any available four bedroom properties.

Proposed changed to be included in new policy – Yes

Part 2 - Demographic information from consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy

Source - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/>

Population – 89,500 in Stevenage. 95% confidence value would be achieved from 350-400 responses. 551 responses in total. Margin of error of 4%.

The consultation is statistically relevant.

Question	Answers	Number	Percentage	Census
Are you?	Applicant/potential applicant	232	42%	
	Tenant of SBC	151	27%	26%
	Resident of Stevenage	112	20%	
	Employed by a partner	5	1%	
	Employee of SBC	18	3%	

If applicant	Homeless	30	13%	
	Unable to join register	4	2%	
	On the housing register	197	85%	
If on register	Band A	1	1%	
	Band B	10	5%	
	Band C	39	20%	
	Band D	70	36%	
	Band E	19	10%	
	Band F	4	2%	
	Don't know	52	26%	
How many in the household	Single person	128	23%	28.9%
	Couple	65	12%	
	Couple plus one child	64	12%	
	Couple plus two or more children	130	24%	
	Single person plus one child	61	11%	
	Single person with two or more children	66	12%	
Disabled?	Yes	123	22%	18.5%
	No	392	71%	81.5%
Age group	Under 18	17	3%	24%
	18-24	64	12%	20.5
	25-34	161	29%	15.1%
	35-44	145	26%	20.4% (to 49)
	45-54	64	12%	19.5% (50-64)
	55 or over	66	12%	15.2% (65 +)
Gender	Male	135	25%	In Stevenage the gender split is approximately 50:50
	Female	368	67%	
	Trans man	0	0%	
	Trans woman	0	0%	
	Non-binary	1	0%	
	Prefer not to say	12	2%	
Ethnic group	White English	436	79%	82.8%
	White/Asian	4	1%	7.5%
	White other	25	5%	3.6% (for mixed)
	White/Black Caribbean	14	3%	
	White/Black African	4	1%	
	Other mixed	2	0%	
	Black Caribbean	6	1%	4.8% merged
	Black African	12	2%	
	Indian	3	1%	Included in 3.6% above
	Bangladeshi	1	0%	
	Pakistani	2	0%	
	Other	10	2%	1.3%