

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 18th December 2024
Report for: Decision
Report of: Executive Member for Housing and Advice

Report Title

Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 2025

Summary

The report identifies the proposed changes to the Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 2025 and seeks approval for the Policy to go out to public consultation in January 2025.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (i) Approves the Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 2025 to go out to public consultation in January 2025.
- (ii) Receives the Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 2025 for approval to publish in April 2025 following the public consultation.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Caroline Siddall, Housing Strategy & Growth Manager
Jennifer Jenkins, Housing Project Officer

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Trafford Draft Housing Allocations Policy 2025
Appendix 2 – Legislative Policy Changes
Appendix 3 – Summary of Proposed Changes to the Allocations Policy

Background Papers: None

Implications:

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities:	The priorities detailed within the Policy meet the Council’s Corporate Priorities of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A thriving economy and homes for all.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The best start for our children and young people. • Healthy and independent lives for everyone.
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework:	The Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy adheres to a Legal Framework outlined in Part 6 of the 1996 Housing Act. The Policy is for Trafford residents only. Each authority in GM will have their own Policy specific for their locality.
Financial Considerations:	The Policy will be managed within existing budgeted resources.
Legal Implications:	The Council has duties in respect of homelessness. As the Council has no housing stock it must make alternative arrangements to be able to comply with those duties.
Equality/Diversity Implications:	An equality impact assessment has been conducted. The outcome suggests that there is a neutral impact regarding the policy options as the majority of the changes bears no implications for assessing housing need according to the priority (reasonable preference categories) and is not considered when a housing register assessment is undertaken.
Sustainability Implications:	None as a consequence of this report.
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing /ICT/ Assets:	The Policy will be managed within existing budgeted resources.
Risk Management Implications:	None as a consequence of this report.
Health & Wellbeing Implications:	None as a consequence of this report.
Health and Safety Implications:	None as a consequence of this report.
Socioeconomic duty Implications:	The Policy is all encompassing for those who have low financial and economic means. Those who require rehousing on the basis of low financial and economic means are able to access the housing register where their housing need means they require a priority for rehousing. There is neutral impact in terms of the policy changes and those residents who are impacted by socioeconomic needs. This is because there are no changes to the policy with regards to accessing housing on the basis of homelessness, medical, disability or welfare for example. Applicants who ordinarily would not meet the criteria, have the opportunity to put forward their situation for exceptional circumstances. Further applicants that are captured as having financial difficulties, or who are living in unsuitable accommodation will be referred for a homelessness assessment for advice and further action where necessary. The policy changes do not impact or change the process.

1.0 **Background**

1.1 The Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 2025 explains the rules, criteria and procedure that determines how the Council will nominate households to social and affordable rented Registered Provider (RP) properties in the borough. Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST), administer this Policy and the Housing Strategy & Growth Team are responsible for producing the Policy and ensuring its implementation.

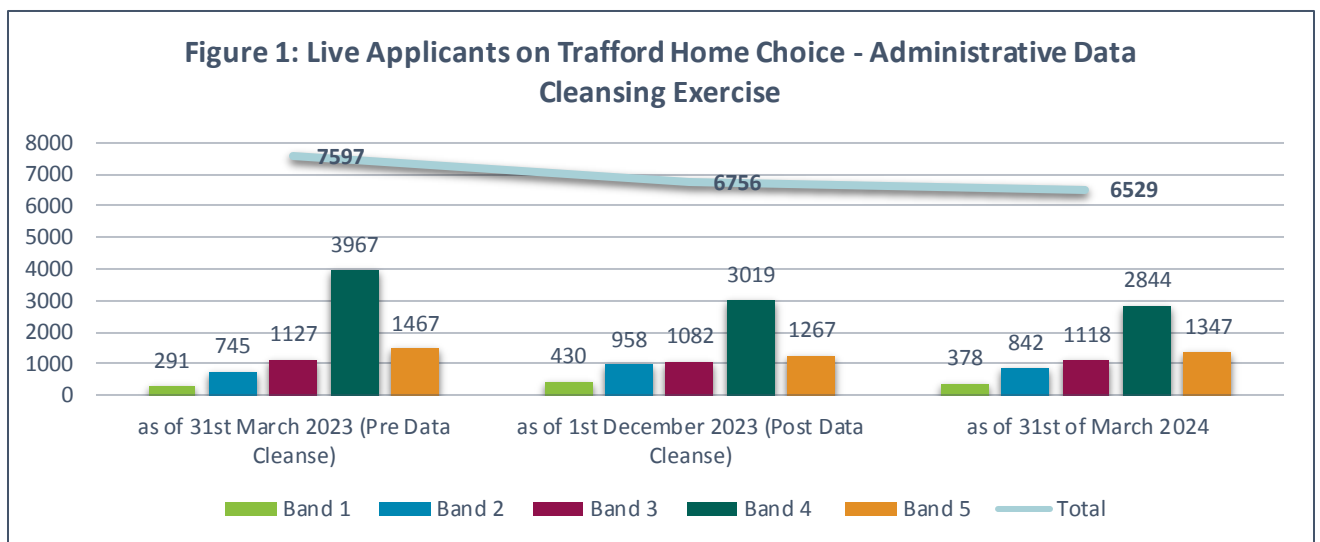
- 1.2 The aim of the Policy is to assist as many people as possible into settled accommodation, by offering applicants real choice of quality housing, whilst continuing to give preference to those in the most urgent housing need. The aims of the Policy are:
- To make best use of the limited affordable housing provision in the borough.
 - To ensure that Applicants in need are given the opportunity to access affordable housing.
 - To meet the legal requirements set by housing legislation.
 - To create sustainable communities where people want to live and feel safe.
 - To provide choice to Applicants balanced against the shortage of social housing.
 - To ensure that no group or individual is discriminated against because of this Policy and to promote equal opportunities.
- 1.3 The Policy must adhere to a Legal Framework outlined in Part 6 of the 1996 Housing Act, an element of which mandates that certain groups of applicants must be given 'reasonable preference' in determining who is allocated properties. This already applies to people who are homeless and some who face losing their accommodation within 28 days, but the HRA extends this preference to all applicants who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- 1.4 Reasonable preference applies to the following applicants:
- Homeless people owed a full duty under part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
 - Homeless individuals (not owed a full duty under the above Act).
 - Applicants occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
 - Applicants who need to move on medical or welfare grounds or grounds of disability.
 - Those who need to move to a particular locality in the district where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).
- 1.5 The Policy works alongside the Nominations Agreement that provides the percentage nomination rights to the RPs available properties. As Trafford is a non-stock holding authority, it is vital that a Nominations Agreement is in place to enable the Council to have access to available RP properties to allow people on the Council's Housing Register be re-housed using the Allocations Policy. Nominations vary from 50% up to 100% depending on the RP. The percentage equates to the proportion of vacant social rented homes the Council has access to and is therefore able to re-house people from the Housing Register. Trafford's main stockholder, L&Q (formally THT), is in the process of increasing the nomination percentage from 75% to 100%, which means that the Council will have access to all available properties from L&Q. The intention is that this move to 100% will be by January 2025. The Nomination Agreements are reviewed annually and do not need to be reviewed in line with this Policy Review.
- 1.6 Local Authorities can adopt different systems of prioritising between applicants. Trafford adopted a Banding scheme which operates by grouping applicants into several bands, which reflect differing levels of housing needs or relative priorities within the allocation scheme.
- 1.7 Trafford's current Bands are as follows:
- Band 1 – Urgent need to move and owed Reasonable Preference
 - Band 2 – Need to move and owed Reasonable Preference
 - Band 3 – Owed Reasonable Preference but do not meet criteria for Bands 1 & 2
 - Band 4 – No housing need but meet the Trafford Positive Community Criteria

- Band 5 – Reduced preference due to rent arrears, behaviour, no local connection, or savings, equity, or earnings above threshold.

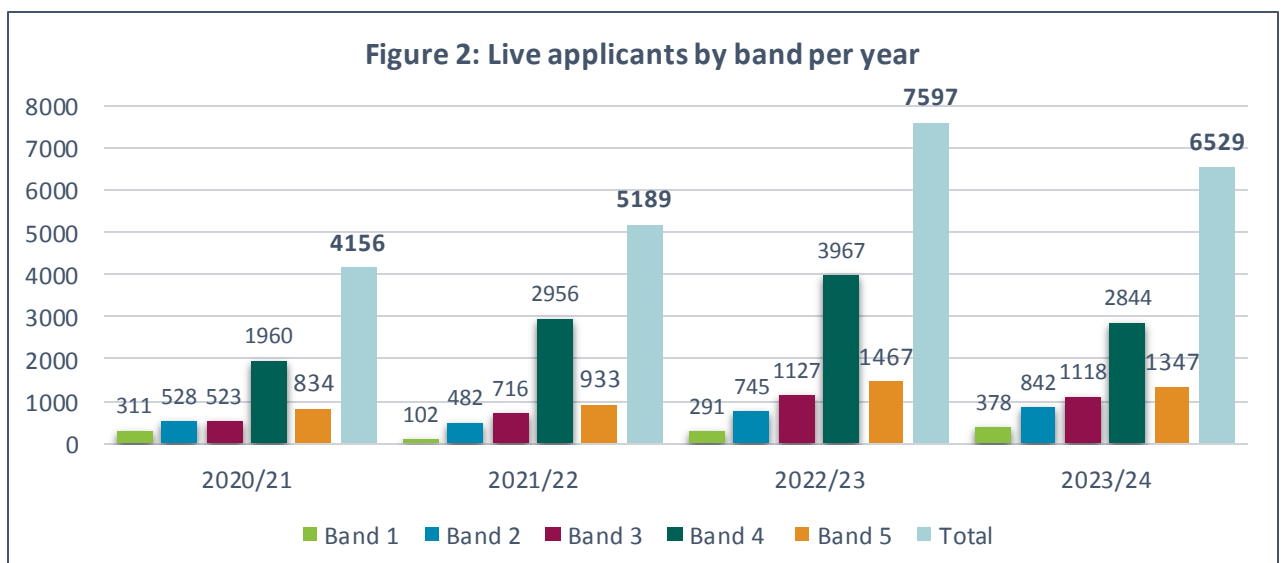
2.0 Trafford HomeChoice – Data and Statistics

2.1 Trafford HomeChoice is the system used to administer the Council’s Housing Register and advertise available Registered Provider (RP) properties that have been nominated. As at 31st March 2024, there were 6,592 live applicants on the Council’s Housing Register. Administrative data cleansing of the Housing Register was conducted in December 2023 to enable the removal of inactive applicants from the Housing Register who had never placed a bid within 18 months of registering.

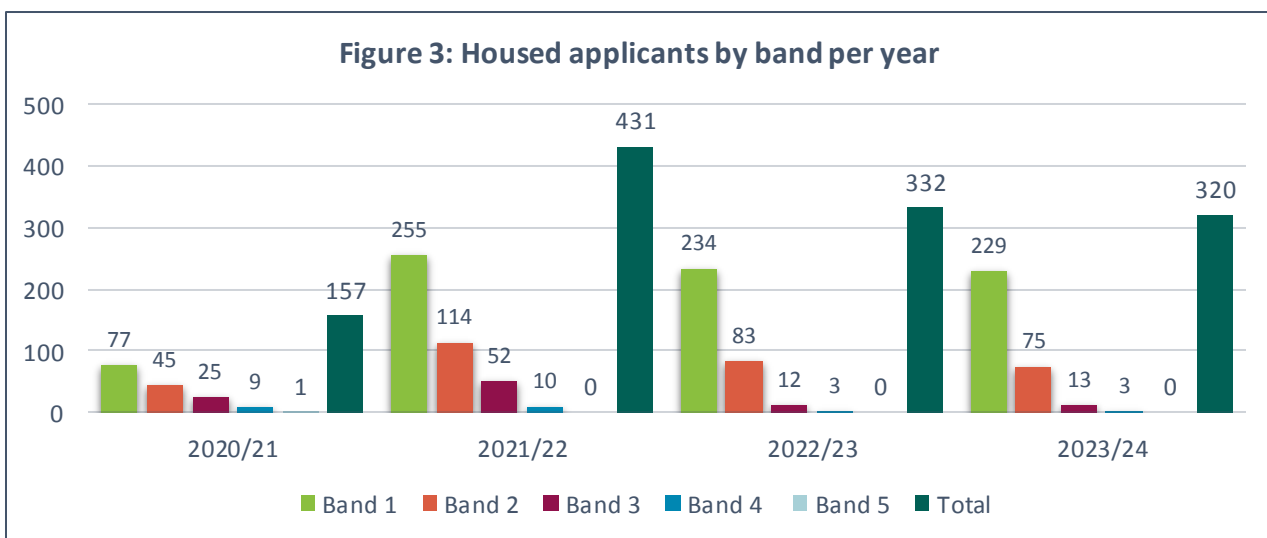
2.2 Figure 1 shows the live applicants on the Housing Register prior to the data cleanse, post data cleanse and as of 31st of March 2024. Approximately 841 applicants were removed from the Housing Register in December 2023. Since the data cleansing exercise, there are 80 new applicants in Band 5.



2.3 Figure 2 shows the live applicants by band per year, over the last 4 years. As at the end of each year (31st March). This provides a detailed insight into the demand for rehousing in Trafford.



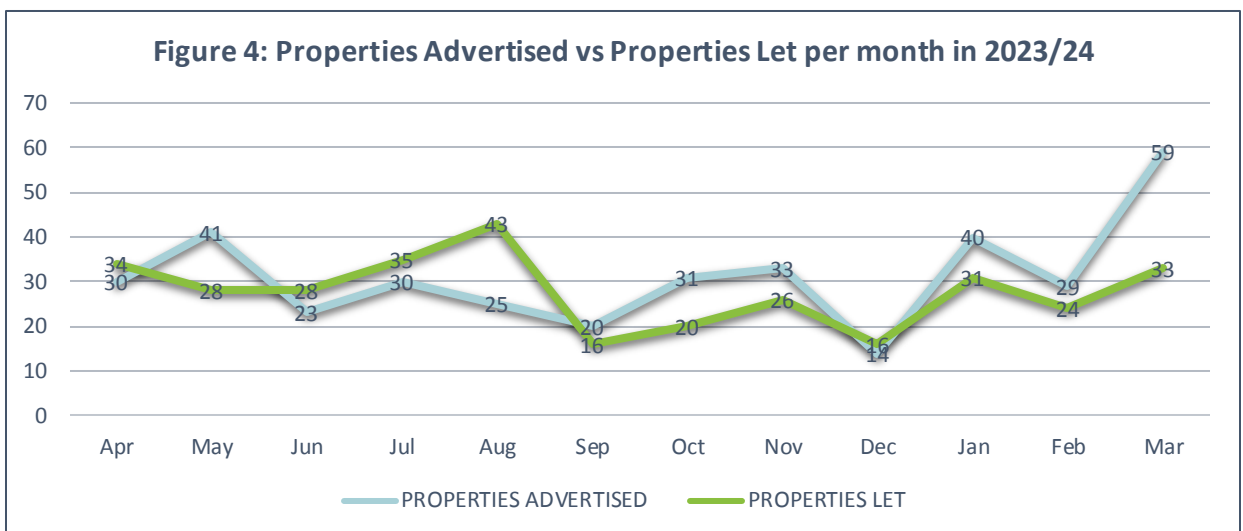
- 2.4 Since 2020/21, Band 1 has seen a 22% increase in applicants (67). This increase is not as significant as the other bandings, mainly due to there being a large turnover of applicants in this Band as they are the priority for properties. The increase in applicants is attributed to the increase in homelessness applications and those awarded a homeless duty and therefore priority on the housing register.
- 2.5 There has been an increase of 2,463 homeless applications since 2022/23. This has resulted in an increase of 306 applicants who are owed the main Housing Duty who subsequently were placed in Band 1.
- 2.6 Band 2 has seen an increase of 314 applicants (59%), over the past 4 years. The likely reason is attributed to again the increase in homelessness applications and those awarded a homeless duty. Similar to Band 1, there is a good turnover of applicants in this band, as they are the second prioritised applicants for properties.
- 2.7 Band 3 categories include applicants who aged 55+ with a housing need, applicants who are under occupying and homeless applicants whose final decision is that they are intentionally homeless. Band 3 has seen a significant increase of 595 applicants, (114% increase). There is less turnover of applicants in this Band and therefore many applicants will not be rehoused in this Band despite being third priority.
- 2.8 Band 4 has seen an increase of 844 applicants (45% increase). This banding has even less turnover of applicants and most of this band will not be rehoused.
- 2.9 Band 5 has also seen an increase of 513 applicants (62% increase). Applicants in this banding are likely to never be rehoused via the Housing Register.
- 2.10 Figure 3 shows applicants housed by Band per year. Overall, the total number of applicants housed per year since 2020/21 peaked in 2021/22 at 452 applicants housed and has since decreased (-28% since the peak). This is entirely dependent on the properties becoming available from RPs for nomination.



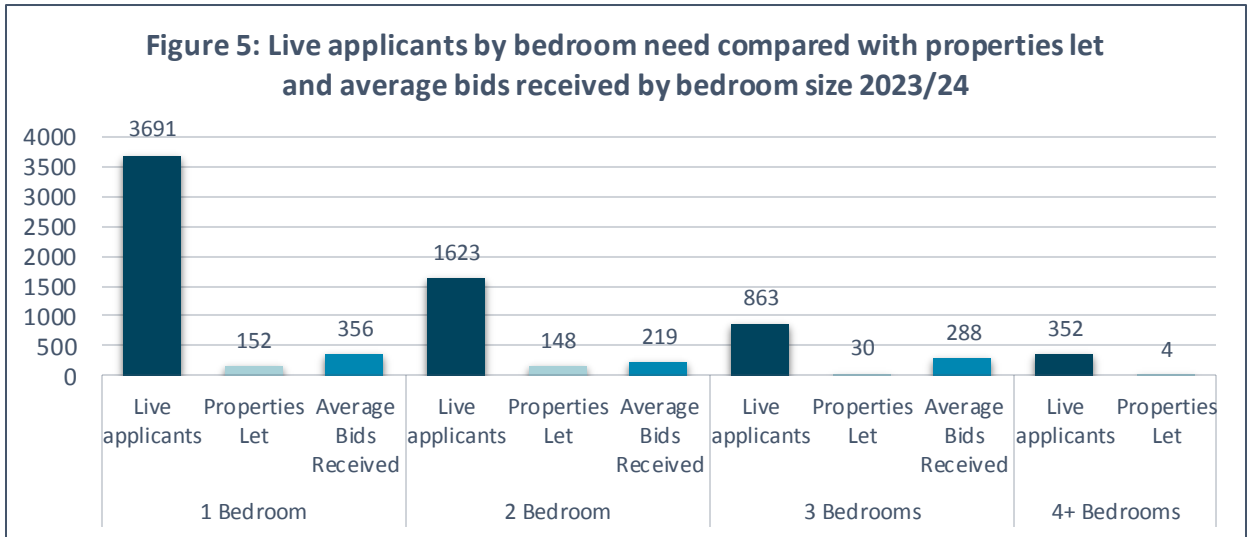
- 2.11 5% of the total applicants on the Housing Register were housed in 2023/24. On average over the last 4 years, 6% of applicants have been rehoused. This suggests that on average 94% of

applicants on the Housing Register will not be rehoused, unless there is a significant increase in the properties becoming available for nomination.

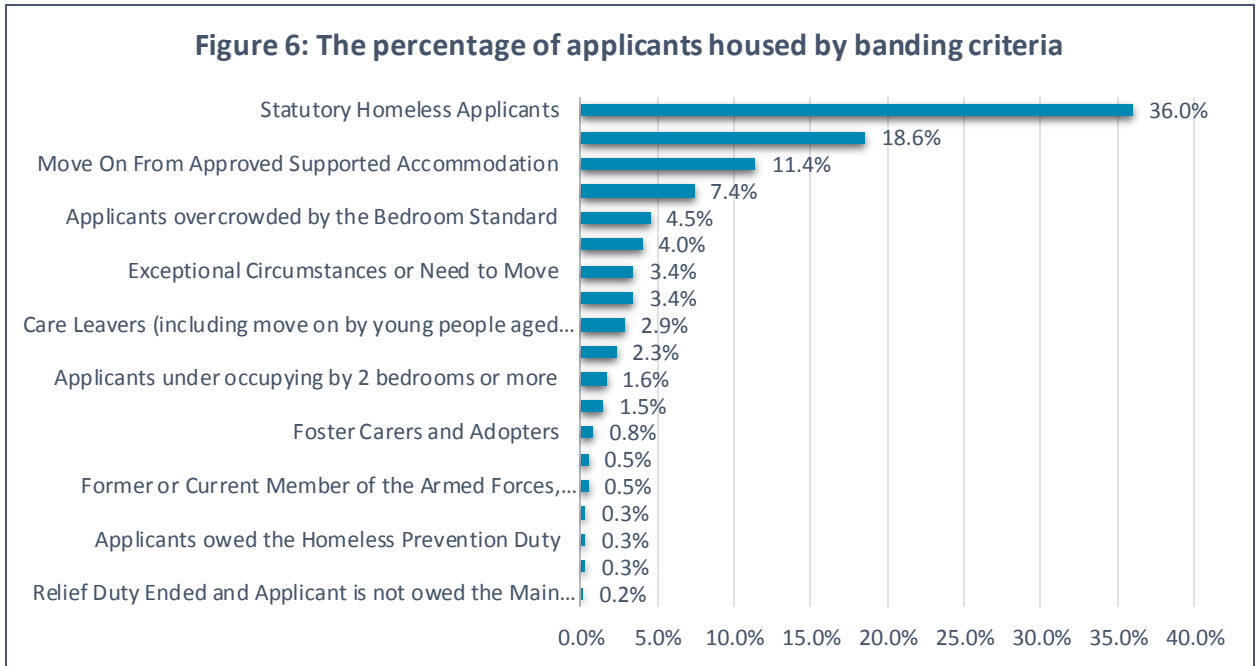
- 2.12 Over the last four years, Bands 1 and 2 have the most rehoused applicants. This is as expected due to the order of the priority bands.
- 2.13 In Band 4, 25 applicants were re-housed (0.11% of the total applicants). Applicants in Band 4 were specifically nominated for housing on the basis that the applicants were in employment, alongside other criteria set by RPs, including age related minimums and maximums for properties.
- 2.14 No applicants in Band 5 have been rehoused in the last 3 years.
- 2.15 Figure 4 shows the number of properties advertised versus the number of properties let per month in 2023/24. Properties can be readvertised more than once which accounts for the higher numbers of properties advertised than let. The number of properties let fluctuates on a monthly basis and is entirely dependent on the availability of stock from the RPs.



- 2.16 The availability of stock from RPs has reduced due to a number of factors. This includes the lack of turn over within RP stock, owing to financial difficulties of families hampering move on into the property market following the rise in mortgage rates, and the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2.17 Figure 5 shows the number of live applicants by bedroom need compared with the properties let and average bids received by bedroom size.



- 1.8 1 bedroom properties continue to be the most sought after type of accommodation by Trafford Home Choice applicants. A total of 3,691 applicants as of 31st of March 2024 are seeking one bedroom properties. 152, 1 bedroom properties were let via Trafford Home Choice in the past year. The average bid received per property was 356 and highlights the demand versus availability of properties.
- 2.18 2-bedroom properties are the second most sought after type of accommodation required by applicants. There are 1,623 applicants as of 31st of March 2024 seeking 2 bedroomed properties. 148, 2-bedroom properties were let via Trafford Home Choice in the past year. The average bid per property was 219 and highlights the demand versus availability of properties.
- 2.19 3 and 4+ bedroom properties are the least sought after properties as there are a much higher percentage of applicants seeking 1- and 2-bedroom properties. A total of 863 applicants are seeking 3-bedroom properties, and 352 are seeking 4 bedroom properties. A total of 30 properties were let with 3 bedrooms with the average bid per property at 288. 4 properties were let with 4+ bedrooms with an average bid of 4 highlighting the demanded versus availability of properties.
- 2.20 Figure 6 shows the percentage of applicants housed by banding criteria. Bands 1-3 have more than one criterion in which an applicant can meet. The most applicants housed were those who were statutory homeless applicants, accounting for 36.0%. This is followed by emergency medical, disability or welfare at 18.6% and move on from approved supported accommodation 11.4% and Applicants aged 55 years and over at 7.4%.



2.21 In summary, the data shows that applicants in Bands 4 and 5 equate to 65% of all live applications on the Housing Register and applicants in these bands have no recognised housing need. Over the past four years 25 applicants from Band 4 were re-housed (0.11% of the total applicants) and no applicants in Band 5 have been rehoused. It is therefore prudent that these bands are removed to allow staff time to be used more effectively processing applications from those with a recognised housing need (Bands 1-3) and allow the Council to manage expectations by excluding people who have little or no prospect of being allocated social housing accommodation.

3.0 Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy – Proposed Changes

3.1 The current housing climate is ever-changing and therefore Trafford’s Allocations Policy needs to be reviewed in light of changes to government Legislation. In addition, due to the limited social housing stock available, consideration is needed to only allow those in housing need to join the Council’s Housing Register. This will allow the Council to manage expectations by excluding people who have little or no prospect of being allocated social housing accommodation, whilst making best use of the available housing stock from RPs. See Appendix 1 for the proposed Draft Trafford Allocations Policy 2025.

Legislative Changes

3.2 The government made changes to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (see Appendix 2) which means that the Allocations Policy must be amended in line with these changes. These amendments do not impact the Bandings or who is placed in each Band, the changes amend the wording contained within the Policy. The amendments are detailed below:

- Amendments to the eligibility rules under Part 6 of the Housing Act with regards to immigration control and who is eligible for social housing. These amendments will need to be include within the revision of the Allocations Policy 2025. The rules have been

amended to allow the following and Appendix 2 provides further information regarding this eligibility changes:

- A person granted leave by virtue of the ARAP scheme for locally employed staff in Afghanistan.
 - A person with leave to enter or remain in the UK who left Afghanistan in connection with the collapse of the Afghan government in August 2021.
 - A person in the UK who left the Ukraine in connection with the Russian invasion.
 - A person in the UK who has limited leave to remain in accommodation with the Ukraine immigration rules.
 - A person who was residing in Sudan before 15th April 2023 and left in connection with the violence.
 - A person who was residing in Israel, the West Bank, The Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem the Golan Heights or Lebanon immediately before 7th October 2023 and left in connection with the Hamas terrorist attack.
- Insertion of Domestic Abuse section, explaining rationale, legislation changes and amendments to an award of reasonable preference for those who meet the criteria. Section 166A(3)(d) provides that local authorities must frame their allocation scheme to ensure that reasonable preference is given to people who need to move on medical and welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability. Guidance updated in June 2022 strongly encourages all local authorities to apply the medical and welfare reasonable preference category to victims and their families who have escaped abuse and are being accommodated in a refuge or other temporary accommodation.

1.9 LAs are also strongly encouraged to exempt from their residency requirements those who are living in a refuge or other form of safe temporary accommodation in their district having escaped domestic abuse in another local authority area. This amendment strengthens the criteria surrounding domestic abuse, but the bandings will remain the same as these applicants already receive Band 1.

Removal of Band 4 and 5

3.3 The current housing climate is ever-changing and therefore the Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy needs to be reviewed to reflect the significant demand. Due to the limited social housing stock available, consideration is needed to only allow those in housing need only to join the Housing Register and therefore remove Bands 4 and 5. This will allow the Council to manage expectations for those that have little or no prospect of being allocated social housing, whilst making best use of the available housing stock from RPs. The Allocation of Accommodation Guidance issued by MHCLG advises it is not considered a viable solution to place applicants into a Band where there is little chance, they will be housed.

3.4 Applicants in Band 4 do not have a housing need as set out by the reasonable preference categories (as mentioned at 1.3) and therefore do not have a requirement for rehousing. Those in Band 5 have no local connection to Trafford, have a certain level of financial resources, have no housing need, rent arrears, or have engaged in anti-social behaviour. As of 2023/24, the data shows that Bands 4 and 5 account for:

- 64% (4,191 applicants) of the total applicants on the housing register.
- 99.95% of these applicants were not rehoused, 0.05% of these applicants were housed in Band 4 and none in Band 5.

- Jointly assessing the applicants of Bands 4 and 5 over a 3-year period equates to 1,811 hours of work over a 3-year period. This is approximately 603 hours of work required per year which is 36% of an officer's total yearly hours worked. This work could be spent in other areas within the Housing Options team to those with the greatest housing need, and a chance of rehousing in the Borough. System changes can be made to auto-assess applicants who would not qualify, removing the requirement for staff assessments. Exceptional circumstance applications will still be considered.

3.6 The effects of removing Bands 4 and 5 are detailed below:

- This would result in the removal of 4,191 applicants. No applicants in Bands 1, 2 and 3 would be affected by the banding changes.
- Applicants in Band 4 have no reasonable preference and therefore this is not a requirement of the LA to include these applicants within the Policy.
- This would create a more manageable and meaningful Housing Register which reflects applicants with the most housing need.
- HOST would gain an officer's yearly hours of 36% which could be used elsewhere within the service to provide support and guidance towards housing options that are achievable for applicants.
- In relation to the Trafford Positive Community Criteria and the 20% nomination percentage to applicants who are working – this would no longer apply. RPs would be required to source suitable applicants who have the most urgent housing need and set local lettings policies with supporting equality impact assessments where they wish to prioritise working applicants. The local lettings policy ensures that communities remain balance, whilst evidencing compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).
- There are no legislative impacts. The Localism Act 2011 specifically gave LA's the freedom to determine who qualifies for social housing in their area and develop solutions which make best use of their social housing stock.

3.7 With the removal of Bands 4 and 5, the proposed new bandings for the Draft Trafford Allocations Policy 2025 are as follows:

Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 20205 – Proposed Priority Bands	
Band 1	Urgent housing need and owed Reasonable Preference.
Band 2	Need to move and owed Reasonable Preference.
Band 3	Applicants who do not meet the criteria for Band 1 and 2 but fall into the Reasonable Preference Category.

Other Changes

3.8 There are a number of other proposed changes to the wording in the Policy, mainly to strengthen the criteria or provide a more transparent approach to the administration of the Policy. These changes proposed are listed below:

- To separate, rationale, guidance and reasoning within the policy under Band 1: Medical, Disability or Welfare (emergency need to move) and Band 2: Medical Grounds (non-emergency but severe need to move).
- To introduce secondary guidance on assessing applications under Medical, Social & Welfare Criteria to fully explore awards given under these criteria.

- Strengthened the rationale within the policy for Care Leavers (including move on by young people aged 16-21 years), to ensure that the evidence aligns with the need for move on.
- Insert additional preference for households who fall under the Armed Forces category.
- Extend decision deadline for reviews from 28 days to 8 weeks.

3.9 A summary of all the proposed changes to the Policy, the rationale and implications are detailed in Appendix 3.

4.0 Consultation

4.1 Initial consultation on options to change the Allocations Policy took place with the Executive in October 2025. The proposed changes to the Policy have been set following this and it is now prudent to go out to public consultation. It is proposed that the public consultation starts in early January 2025 for a six week period via Citizens Space and will be promoted via a press release and social media channels.

4.2 Following public consultation, the Policy may be amended if relevant and necessary, and the Executive will be asked for approval to publish the final Trafford Housing allocations Policy 2025 in April 2025.

5.0 Wider Corporate Linkages

5.1 The Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 2025 meets the Corporate Priorities of 'A thriving economy and homes for all', 'The best start for our children and young people' and 'Healthy and independent lives for everyone'.

6.0 Other Options

6.1 Without adopting the recommended legislative and guidance changes, Trafford could be in breach of its public sector equality duty and subject to challenges under housing legislation and would not be compliant with Parts 6 and 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Trafford therefore must make the legislative changes to ensure that the policy remains compliant with current law and guidance issued by MHCLG.

6.2 Trafford could choose not to implement any Band changes to the Policy; however, this will result in a continued increase in applicants who have little or no chance of being re-housed. The current housing crisis and lack of supply of social housing in Trafford means that the Council needs to manage the Policy and Bandings in a better way and ensure those residents with a housing need (Bands 1-3) have priority.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendation

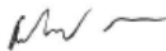
7.1 The Executive is asked to approve the Draft Trafford Housing Allocations Policy 2025, for the purposes of public consultation to enable Trafford residents to shape the new Policy and provide comments before it is adopted.

Key Decision No

If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given? n/a

Finance Officer Clearance- PC
Legal Officer Clearance – ZH

CORPORATE DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE

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To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.