

Allocations Policy Review 2018

Consultation Feedback Report – RP Event 'You Said, We Did'



Consultation Feedback

Trafford Council arranged an event with our Registered Provider (RP) partners on the 17th April 2018. The event was an opportunity for the RPs to comment on the Draft Housing Allocations Policy and Draft Nominations Agreement 2018.

This report provides a summary of the proposed changes to these documents and the comments and feedback received during the event including our response to the comments made.

Allocations Policy

INTRODUCTION

Trafford Council's Housing Allocation Policy was last reviewed in March 2013 and due to the changes to homelessness legislation through the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), a further review is required.

The HRA came into force on 3rd April 2018 and the new Act amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 which provides local authorities' statutory duties when dealing with homelessness. The HRA amends and introduces a number of new duties, including:

- A duty to provide information and advice to all.
- A duty to formulate a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) for those applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- A duty to prevent homelessness within 56 days – 'Prevention Duty'.
- A duty to relieve an applicants' homelessness by helping them secure accommodation that would be available for them to occupy for a period of at least 6 months, within 56 days – 'Relief Duty'.

The Housing Allocation Policy explains the rules, criteria and procedure that determine how the Council will nominate households to social and affordable rented Registered Provider (RP) properties in the borough. Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST), who provides homelessness and housing advice on behalf of the Council, administer this policy. However the Council is responsible for producing the Policy and ensuring its implementation.

POLICY CHANGES

In line with the HRA, the following key amendments are proposed to the criteria in Bands 1 to 3, and the Allocations Policy:

- Applicants who have been assessed as statutory homelessness are moved from Band 2 to Band 1.
- Homelessness applicants who are owed the 56 day Relief Duty in accordance with The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are placed into Band 2.
- Homelessness applicants who are owed the 56 day Prevention Duty, in accordance with The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, are placed into Band 3. Applicants will be moved to Band 2 after 28 days provided they have complied with all aspects of the Personal Housing Plan.
- Exceptional Circumstances Award is being limited to 12 months; currently there is no limit to this award. This new rule will stop people sitting on their award waiting for the 'perfect' property to be advertised. Should a person be awarded exceptional need to move the Council would assume that this need is urgent and therefore would have taken place within 12 months.
- One offer only rule across all Bands - applications will be cancelled upon refusal of a suitable offer of accommodation, unless there is a valid reason, which will be addressed at a review/appeal process. Currently applicants are able to refuse offers and continue to wait on the register for an indefinite time. This new rule will stop people sitting on the Housing Register waiting until the 'perfect' property to be advertised. It will save officer time at HOST and within the RPs who make an offer which is then withdrawn/ refused by the applicant.
- Tenants of Registered Providers under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms will be reduced from Band 1 to Band 2 and tenants of Registered Providers under occupying by 1 bedroom will be reduced from Band 2 to Band 3. These categories were introduced to assist with government changes in Housing Benefit awards when tenants were under occupying. The Council believes that tenants who needed to move will have done so. Any tenants who find themselves in this situation will be awarded the Prevention Duty and receive help via the HRA. This change will allow those remaining in Band 1 more available properties and thus facilitating speedier move on from supported accommodation as well as less time in temporary accommodation for those owed a main homelessness duty.
- No changes are being made to Bands 4 and 5 as the applicants in these Bands are not affected by the changes enacted by the HRA.

CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

The table below provides a summary of the comments received during the event and our response.

Topic	Comments	Response
Overall Views	<p>RPs agreed with the changes proposed to the Policy in line with the HRA and had no major issues.</p> <p>RPs felt that realistic expectations of being offered a property via Home Search should be shown in the Personal Housing Plans (PHPs).</p>	<p>The Council welcomes the RPs views and positivity towards to changes to the Policy.</p> <p>HOST will ensure that all PHPs will contain realistic expectations regarding the re-housing of applicants via Trafford Home Search.</p>
Under Occupancy	<p>RPs advised that applicants on a DHP may need further assistance to find alternative accommodation.</p> <p>RPs asked if an exceptional circumstances award could be applied if necessary.</p> <p>RPs asked if there will be assisted bidding.</p> <p>RPs agreed that the changes will not have much effect.</p>	<p>The Council have made contact with the Revenues & Benefits Team to determine who is currently in receipt of a DHP for under-occupancy. The figure is at 39 which is low and not causing a concern.</p> <p>No change has been made to how exceptional circumstances are applied and all applications should be submitted to HOST for the panel to consider.</p> <p>Assisted bidding will remain the same for those applicants who are owed the main homeless duty and for those that require additional support.</p> <p>The Council were happy that this proposed change to the Policy would not have much of an effect.</p>

	<p>RP's agreed there is a need to promote/publicise Mutual Exchange.</p>	<p>RP's will need to ensure that mutual exchange is publicised with their residents. The Council will look to promote once a new CBL system has been procured.</p>
Band 1	<p>RP's advised that increasing the Band may not result in being rehoused quicker as the supply/demand issue will remain.</p> <p>RP's advised that there is a need to manage client's expectations.</p> <p>RP's asked will auto bids be used for these applicants.</p> <p>RP's agreed that Homeless applicants should be in Band 1.</p>	<p>The Council acknowledges this response and will ensure via HOST that customer expectations are managed.</p> <p>Currently there isn't the facility to have an auto bid function. However this is something we are considering within the specification for the new CBL system.</p> <p>The Council welcomes this view regarding homeless people being placed in Band 1.</p>
One Offer Rule	<p>RP's agreed that there should be one reasonable offer.</p> <p>RP's asked that schooling should be taken into consideration for those in GCSE years or where there are special educational needs.</p> <p>RP's agreed that the one offer rule should reduce staff time and void turnaround.</p> <p>RP's asked if there was a timescale as to when a client can reapply.</p>	<p>The Council welcomes the RP's view regarding the 'One Offer Rule'.</p> <p>Those applicants which children at GCSE year or with SEN will be considered to ensure an appropriate offer of accommodation is provided.</p> <p>The Council agrees that this new rule should reduce staff time and reduce void turnaround.</p> <p>There will be a 12 month time limit applied before applicants can re-apply to go back onto the register following cancellation of their application.</p>

	<p>RPs asked if exceptional circumstances be considered.</p> <p>RPs agreed that there would be a need to establish a review/ reconsideration process.</p>	<p>No change has been made to how exceptional circumstances are applied and all applications should be submitted to HOST for the panel to consider.</p> <p>A review panel will be established to consider appeals when removed from the Housing Register following refusal of a suitable offer. The panel will be in line with the exceptional circumstances panel and have the same representatives from the Council and HOST.</p>
Armed Forces	<p>RPs asked will this be linked to local connection.</p> <p>RPs suggested there should there be a 5 year limit from date of leaving or for those coming straight from army accommodation.</p> <p>RPs asked if those dishonourably discharged are discounted.</p>	<p>Local connection will be considered.</p> <p>A 5 year time limit has been added to the Policy.</p> <p>Those dishonourably discharged will be discounted.</p>
Band 5	<p>RPs asked whether arrears should be addressed in The Nominations Agreement or The Allocations Policy.</p>	<p>Clients will be down-banded to Band 5 if they have arrears and will be addressed within the Allocations Policy. Trafford Council will still require the agreed number of properties as per the Nominations Agreement.</p>

	<p>RP's asked if the arrears are historical or for another reason.</p> <p>RP's asked whether exceptional circumstances be applied.</p> <p>RP's asked whether there will there be a time limit for ASB issues/if the ASB has been addressed will they be up-banded.</p> <p>RP's asked whether mental health needs to be considered when dealing with ASB issues.</p>	<p>Any arrears that would have any negative impact on a client's application will be down banded unless agreed otherwise by the exceptional circumstances panel.</p> <p>Exceptional circumstances will be considered on individual cases.</p> <p>These cases would have to be submitted to the exceptional circumstances panel.</p> <p>Cases would have to be submitted to the exceptional circumstances panel with evidence.</p>
Earnings/Savings	<p>RP's asked if an affordability assessment (household income/household outgoings) should be undertaken.</p> <p>RP's felt that people who are working and earning £50,000 should have access to social housing. Are earners being penalised by being placed in the reduced preference band.</p> <p>RP's confirmed that the savings figure of £16,000 is comparable to there.</p>	<p>There is a question on registration regarding income and savings – any exceptions will need to be looked at by the exceptional circumstances panel.</p> <p>The upper earning level has been increased to £60,000 which is in alignment with most RP's.</p> <p>The savings figure has remained the same.</p>

FINAL COMMENTS

Trafford Council would like to thank all those RPs that attended the event on the 17th April. The Council are now seeking wider views for members of the public and the other RPs that were unable to attend.

A copy of the draft Policy and on-line consultation survey is available on the Council's website at:

<http://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/strategies-plans-and-policies/housing-strategy/Housing-policies-strategies.aspx>

The consultation commences on **Monday 13th August** and ends on **Friday 21st September**. We will be in touch once the formal consultation has ended and the final Policy has been produced.

If you have any further comments or concerns, please email housing.strategy@trafford.gov.uk