

# **POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL**

**23 November 2020**

## **CABINET**

**26 November 2020**

# **EASTLEIGH SCHEME OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS**

## **Report of the Housing & Homelessness Specialist**

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### **Recommendation(s)**

#### **For Policy & Performance Scrutiny Panel**

#### **It is recommended that**

Policy & Performance Scrutiny Panel considers the proposed amendments in the report and makes any recommendations to Cabinet.

#### **For Cabinet**

#### **It is recommended that**

Cabinet approves the proposed amendments to the Eastleigh Scheme of Allocations which underpins the Hampshire Home Choice (HHC) Allocations Framework. The key areas for amendment are:

- (1)** Award high priority banding (Band 2) to applicants occupying homeless temporary accommodation stock for 2 years
- (2)** Effect amendments throughout the policy to reflect the legislative changes brought about by the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

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### **Summary**

Eastleigh Borough Council joined the Hampshire Home Choice Scheme of Allocations in 2014. Local Authorities are required to establish a scheme of allocations determining the priorities of those who apply for housing and setting out the procedures to be followed in the allocation of housing. The HHC Allocations Framework is the resulting policy, jointly agreed by the 5 local authorities. As detailed in the HHC Framework, each local authority is also required to maintain its own scheme of allocations which may contain separate policies to ensure the policy best suites the needs of the district.

Eastleigh's Scheme of Allocations has remained unchanged since its first publication in 2014. A recent review has highlighted areas within the policy that either no longer fall in

line with government legislation and/or have scope for development to efficiently maximise housing opportunities for homeless households.

### **Statutory Powers**

Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

### **Strategic Implications**

1. Approving these plans will ensure the Council is meeting its legal responsibilities and increase the supply of homeless temporary accommodation stock in the borough. This addresses the following Corporate Plan objectives:
  - Enabling healthier lifestyles/wellbeing
  - Tackling deprivation

### **Introduction**

2. Eastleigh Borough Council joined the Hampshire Home Choice Framework partnership in 2014 along with East Hampshire District Council, Havant Borough Council, Test Valley Borough Council and Winchester City Council. HHC is a common approach to the allocation of social housing across 5 local authority areas with an allocations policy agreed by all 5 organisations. Local authorities are also required to maintain their own allocations policy giving scope to address and reflect local priorities. The Eastleigh Scheme of Allocations was introduced in 2014 to coincide with the Council's decision to join HHC
3. Since the implementation of the Eastleigh Scheme of Allocations, there has been a significant change to homelessness legislation. April 2018 saw the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which revolutionised the way local authorities deal with homelessness.
4. This report details proposals to amend the Eastleigh Scheme of Allocations. The Scheme is attached at Appendix 1. The report proposes modification to reflect the changes to legislative duties placed on local authorities brought about by the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2017 and seeks to increase housing supply to combat the increased levels of homelessness.

## Main Report

5. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places additional duties on local authorities to work with homeless/threatened homeless households. The Act implemented a more prevention-based approach to tackling homelessness to minimise the impact that homelessness and/or a threat of homelessness has on a household and requires authorities to work with homeless/threatened homeless households under two new duties, the Prevention duty & the Relief duty.

Local authorities have the freedom to create an allocations policy to best suit the needs of their district providing that applicants falling into specified groups (including homelessness) are awarded a reasonable degree of preference for an allocation of social housing. The newly implemented legislation is not reflected within the current Eastleigh Scheme of Allocations and therefore the reviewed policy (at Appendix 1) recognises an award of priority to applicants to whom the local authority owes the Prevention or Relief duties.

6. The second amendment proposes a change to the priority of households accommodated in homeless temporary accommodation stock in excess of 2 years. This stock is offered to homeless households to prevent or relieve the use of emergency accommodation such as bed and breakfast. The tenants accommodated within this stock often have limited resources to secure ongoing housing options and are therefore reliant upon awaiting an allocation of social housing through HHC. The lengthy housing register waiting times result in a slow turnover of temporary accommodation vacancies. Introducing an increase in priority band to applicants who have tenanted homeless temporary accommodation stock for a period of 2 years will encourage move on from the stock.

The consistent message from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) is to focus on increasing housing supply within the borough. Eastleigh Borough Council has seen a sharp increase in the number of homeless households requiring placement in emergency accommodation over recent years:

	<b>NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS</b>			
	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
<b>SINGLES</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>FAMILIES</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>40</b>

With a further rise in homelessness predicted following the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing the throughput of our temporary accommodation stock will help to reduce our need for emergency accommodation placements.

## **Financial Implications**

7. The proposal to increase the priority band of applicants in homeless temporary accommodation after 2 years will increase the housing supply in the borough and reduce the use of emergency accommodation and subsequently the councils spend on this resource.

## **Risk Assessment**

8. If the proposal to increase the priority band of applicants in homeless temporary accommodation after 2 years is not adopted, homeless families are likely to have increased stays in emergency accommodation causing further social and financial hardship and detriment to the household.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

9. The Equality Act is relevant to the decision in this report as the decision relates to advancing equality of opportunity. An assessment of Equalities impacts is attached at Appendix 2. The assessment demonstrates that people with protected characteristics are afforded proportionate support and protections by both the Hampshire and Eastleigh schemes. Applicants' demographic profile and equality characteristics are recorded through the application process. The Council will review this information and consult with diverse groups to ensure the scheme continues to be inclusive.

## **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

10. There are no Environmental implications to the implementation of these recommendations.

## **Conclusion**

11. The current Eastleigh Scheme of Allocations does not reflect the legislative changes around homelessness, or the increasing homelessness pressures placed on the authority that are predicted to worsen further given the current economic state. The changes (shown included in the new proposed Scheme at Appendix 1) will give additional freedom to Eastleigh Borough Council to manage the stock of homeless temporary accommodation effectively. This will maximise the stock's potential whilst also encouraging tenants to move without offering an incentive to homelessness.

EMMA BOYES  
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Appendices Attached: Appendix 1 Eastleigh Scheme of Allocations  
Appendix 2 Equalities Impact Assessment

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D**

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

None