

Individual Executive Decision Notice Cabinet (Resources) Panel

Report title	Housing Allocations Policy Implementation 2021 'Go Live' update	
Decision designation	GREEN	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Sweetman, Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing	
Wards affected	(All Wards);	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook, Director of City Environment	
Originating service	City Housing	
Accountable employee	Michelle Garbett	Housing Policy Officer
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Report to be/has been considered by	CELT	11 May 2021

Summary

This report seeks authorisation from the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Environment, to approve 28 September 2021 as the date that the adopted Housing Allocations Policy will be fully implemented.

Authority was delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Environment to authorise the new Housing Allocations Policy 'go live' date as part of the November 2020 Cabinet report.

The report also requests approval to make minor editorial amendments to the policy:

1. Section 9.4 of Allocations Policy: Remove reference to WYPAF and replace with Wolverhampton Young Persons Accommodation Gateway.
2. Section 7.5 of Allocations Policy: change reference from average house price in the City to average house price regionally.

Authority was delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Environment to approve minor editorial changes to the Housing Allocations Policy as part of the February 2020 Cabinet report.

Recommendations for decision:

That the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Environment:

1. Approve the timeline and key dates for implementation of the revised Allocations Policy with a 'go live' date of 28 September 2021. This being the date that all adverts and bidding will be made under the new Allocations Policy.
2. Approve the change in terminology from WYPAF to Wolverhampton Young Person's Accommodation Gateway.
3. Approve the change of wording from City to regionally

Recommendation for noting:

1. During all phases of the implementation timeline, provision will continue for applicants in emergency housing need, including those who are homeless.



Signature
Name of Cabinet Member

Date: 16 June 2021



Signature
Ross Cook, Director of City Environment

Date: 12 May 2021

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Local Authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 to have a scheme for determining priorities, and the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation both to first time applicants and transferring tenants including nominations to Registered Providers (Housing Associations); the Allocations Policy.
- 1.2 City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) own 22,280 properties within the city, that are managed by four managing agents; Wolverhampton Homes and the city's three tenant management organisations (TMOs), who are all required to allocate and let the properties they manage in accordance with the CWC Allocation Policy.
- 1.3 The new Housing Allocations Policy received Cabinet approval in February 2020. Due to the need to make significant system changes, the Policy was to be implemented in two stages; the first stage which was not reliant on any IT system change was implemented in April 2020, the second stage which is reliant on IT system change due to be implemented in February 2021.
- 1.4 As a consequence of the national pandemic and the implication on staffing resources this had during the spring and summer of 2020, the proposed date for implementation was delayed. This delay was reported to Cabinet in November 2020 and approval given for the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Environment to grant authorisation for a 'go live' date for the Housing Allocations Policy.

2.0 Progress

Project Implementation

- 2.1 A timeline of key dates until full implementation of the new Housing Allocations Policy has been established. Key to this timeline is the re-build of the IT system on which housing applications and allocations are managed; Northgate (the system). The dates are as follows:
 - a. **July 5 2021**
 - System build of new allocations policy 'rules' commence.
 - b. **July 17 2021**
 - System offline for two weeks, during this period, applications will not be taken and there will be no bidding activity.
 - c. **July 30 2021**

- Bedroom calculations will be deployed. From this date, the policy revision to the ages of same sex children sharing a bedroom past age 15 will be live.

d. August 2 2021

- Adverts resume, applicants with **existing** applications can continue to bid as normal.
- Re-applications process begins, applicants will be contacted in priority order and any **new** applications will be held as pending until 'go live' on 28 September 2021

e. September 28 2021

- New Allocations Policy fully implemented; existing applications closed and all adverts and bidding will commence under new policy.

2.2 If the recommendation in this report are approved, all applicants on the housing register will be informed of the implementation period of the new policy.

Project Resources

2.3 Wolverhampton Homes have secured a Project Manager from its own resources and four other internal members of staff who will offer project support. A further four staff are in the process of being identified and where possible will come from Wolverhampton Homes and partners including the Council and Tenant Management Organisations.

Minor Policy Amendments

2.4 Section 9.4 of the Allocations Policy refers to WYPAF, this should read; Wolverhampton Young Person's Accommodation Gateway.

2.5 Section 7.5 of the Allocations Policy, on referring to income levels being based on an annual averaged priced home in the City. City should be replaced with regionally.

3.0 Evaluation of alternative options

3.1 Option 1 would be to implement the recommendations of this report ensuring the Council is meeting its legislative objectives and is responding to the current operating environment as reflected by the revised policy objectives.

3.2 Option 2 would be to not implement the recommendations of this report, this would result in a partial implementation of the new Allocations Policy not subject to any system change and would not be in line with the communications already send out to housing register applicants or the original approved Cabinet report agreeing an extension to the implementation date.

4.0 Reasons for decision

- 4.1 Option 1 will ensure that the new Allocations Policy can be implemented in a timely manner within clear and achievable timescales allowing the Council and Wolverhampton Homes to give out accurate communications with regards to the new policy. This is important as allocations policies make decisions that affect people's lives and housing opportunities and so need to reflect the latest legislation, regulation, case law and the local market.

5.0 Financial implications

The one off costs associated with the development of the Northgate system approved in the February 2021 Cabinet report remains unchanged.

[JM/06052021/A]

6.0 Legal implications

- 6.1 The Council as a Local Housing Authority is required to allocate housing accommodation in accordance with part VI of the Housing Act 1996. Section 166 of the Act requires the Authority to have an allocation scheme and to allocate housing in accordance with the scheme.
- 6.2 There are periods of time during the implementation stages where the Council could be open to legal challenge. This will be managed by both the Council and Wolverhampton Homes having a robust communications plan in place.

[RP/07052021/A]

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 An equalities analysis has been completed which demonstrates the positive intentions of the changes to the Allocations Policy. There has been liaison with CWCs Equalities Team to ensure applicants are clearly communicated with and are supported in the reassessment of their housing application where needed, so that those vulnerable people with housing needs receive the appropriate priority on the housing register.

8.0 All other Implications

Human Resources

- 8.1 Much of the resource for the project comes from existing WH, CWC and TMO employees. Some resource has been purchased from Northgate, this is included in the finances set aside for the project.

Health and Safety

- 8.2 A WH office has been identified where the work required for the re application process will be carried out. As an Office where staff are already onsite, it is fully Covid compliant.
- 8.3 In the event that CWC staff are required on site, advice will be sought from Health and Safety leads and any Council processes and procedures followed.

9.0 Schedule of background papers

- 9.1 19 February 2020, Allocations Policy Review, Cabinet
- 9.2 22 April 2020, Housing Allocations Policy Amendment, IEDN
- 9.3 11 November 2020, Housing Allocations Policy Implementation,

10.0 Appendices

- 10.1 Appendix 1: Housing Allocations Policy