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1st March 2013

S U M M O N S

MEETING: Community Board
DATE: 11 March 2013
TIME: 6.00pm
PLACE: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Gosport
Democratic Services contact: Vicki Stone

LINDA EDWARDS
BOROUGH SOLICITOR

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

The Mayor (Councillor Dickson) (ex-officio)
Chairman of the Policy and Organisation Board (Councillor Hook) (ex – officio)

Councillor Burgess (Chairman)
Councillor Kimber (Vice – Chairman)

Councillor Carter CK
Councillor Mrs Cully
Councillor Edgar
Councillor Foster-Reed
Councillor Henshaw

Councillor Mrs Hook
Councillor Hylands
Councillor Mrs Morgan
Councillor Murphy
Councillor Mrs Wright

FIRE PRECAUTIONS

(To be read from the Chair if members of the public are present)

In the event of the fire alarm sounding, please leave the room immediately. Proceed downstairs by way of the main stairs or as directed by GBC staff, follow any of the emergency exit signs. People with disability or mobility issues please identify yourself to GBC staff who will assist in your evacuation of the building.

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

- If you are in a wheelchair or have difficulty in walking and require access to the Committee Room on the First Floor of the Town Hall for this meeting, assistance can be provided by Town Hall staff on request

If you require any of the services detailed above please ring the Direct Line for the Democratic Services Officer listed on the Summons (first page).

NOTE:

- i. Councillors are requested to note that, if any Councillor who is not a Member of the Board wishes to speak at the Board meeting, then the Borough Solicitor is required to receive not less than 24 hours prior notice in writing or electronically and such notice shall indicate the agenda item or items on which the member wishes to speak.
- ii. Please note that mobile phones should be switched off for the duration of the meeting.

AGENDA

PART A ITEMS

RECOMMENDED
MINUTE FORMAT

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Members present are required to declare, at this point in the meeting or as soon as possible thereafter, any disclosable pecuniary interest in any item(s) being considered at this meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY BOARD HELD ON 4 FEBRUARY 2013.

4. DEPUTATIONS – STANDING ORDER 3.5

(NOTE: The Board is required to receive a deputation(s) on a matter which is before the meeting of the Board provided that notice of the intended deputation and its object shall have been received by the Borough Solicitor by 12 noon on Thursday, 7 March 2013. The total time for deputations in favour and against a proposal shall not exceed 10 minutes).

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS – STANDING ORDER 3.6

(NOTE: The Board is required to allow a total of 15 minutes for questions from Members of the public on matters within the terms of reference of the Board provided that notice of such Question(s) shall have been submitted to the Borough Solicitor by 12 noon on Thursday, 7 March 2013).

6. A REVIEW OF THE GOSPORT SCHEME OF ALLOCATIONS
To seek approval of the changes required to the Allocations Scheme (Gosport Housing Register) in response to changes in legislation and housing benefit eligibility.

Part II
Contact:
Corinne
Waterfield
Ext 5351

7. ANY OTHER ITEMS

-which the Chairman determines should be considered, by reason of special circumstances, as a matter of urgency.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6

Board/Committee:	COMMUNITY BOARD
Date of Meeting:	11 MARCH 2013
Title:	A REVIEW OF THE GOSPORT SCHEME OF ALLOCATIONS
Author:	HOUSING SERVICES MANAGER
Status:	FOR DECISION

Purpose

To seek approval of the changes required to the Allocations Scheme (Gosport Housing Register) in response to changes in legislation and housing benefit eligibility.

Recommendation

That Members approve the following amendments to the existing Scheme of Allocations:

1. Applicants from the Armed Services (as defined in paragraph 2.2), with existing reasonable preference and an urgent housing need (defined as in receipt of written notification that they must leave their current accommodation within 6 months) be awarded an additional 20 points;
2. The number of bedrooms a household will be eligible for will be in accordance with Housing Benefit criteria unless there are exceptional medical or social circumstances (to be determined by the Housing Services Manager);
3. Transfer applicants under occupying accommodation be awarded an additional 50 points for each under-occupied bedroom based on the revised bedroom criteria provided at Appendix B (section A).

1 Background

- 1.1 The Scheme of Allocations, often referred to as the Allocations Policy (and now called the Policy in this document), underpins the allocation of all Council and Registered Provider stock in Gosport. The last review of the Policy was reported to the Housing Board in November 2010.

At that time there was an expectation that a full review would occur within four years. It is proposed that a fundamental review of the Policy will be brought back to this Board in late 2013/14.

- 1.2 The Government has recently made changes to the statutory provisions dealing with allocations. Firstly, applicants with a HM Armed Forces status, as defined by regulations, are now not subject to local connection criteria in the assessment as to whether they qualify for the allocation of housing accommodation.
- 1.3 Secondly those with Armed Forces Status who have urgent housing needs and fall within one of the existing reasonable preference groups are now to be given additional preference within the Council's Policy. This report makes recommendations as to how these new

requirements are included within the Policy

2 Report

2.1 In developing the proposals contained in this report, consultation has been undertaken with both Housing Register customers and Registered Providers (Housing Associations). The questionnaire was available and publicised to all housing register applicants between 9th July 2012 and 2nd August 2012, which included two bidding cycles. There were 15 responses to the consultation received from members of the public, and an additional 2 responses were received from Registered Provider partners. Details of the results of the consultation are provided at Appendix A.

2.2 Armed Forces Personnel

As set out in paragraph 1.3 above the Council now has to change their policy so that additional preference is given to the following categories of people where they also fall within one or more of the reasonable preference categories, as set out in legislation (homeless, medical or welfare need, unsatisfactory housing, hardship if not moved to a particular locality) and have urgent housing needs:

(i) is serving in the regular forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's service

(ii) formerly served in the regular forces;

(iii) has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence following the death of that person's spouse or civil partner who has served in the regular forces and whose death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that service, or

(iv) is serving or has served in the reserve forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's service.

The 1996 Act does not define urgent housing need. It is recommended that the Policy defines urgent housing need for Armed Forces Personnel as being in receipt of written notification that they must leave their current accommodation within six months

No equality issues have been identified in respect of the recommendation.

2.3 It is recommended that an additional 20 points are awarded to customers who are current or former members of the Armed Forces and their families as defined above. This level of priority is equivalent to that afforded to a severely ill or disabled customer in terms of

medical priority.

2.4 Number of bedrooms

Housing Benefit is being changed for those in social and affordable housing who are of working age from April 2013. From this date the same bedroom criteria that are currently applied to those in the private sector will also be applied to the social rented sector. Details of the housing benefit bedroom criteria are provided at Appendix B, along with a comparison with the existing Allocations Policy criteria. It is recommended that changes are made to the property size that households are able to bid for to reflect their eligibility for Housing Benefit, unless there are exceptional medical or social circumstances (to be determined by the Housing Services Manager). This course of action will ensure that the risk of non-payment of rent is minimised as tenants will be in accommodation of the correct size to claim housing benefit if their financial circumstances require it. It also mirrors what housing association partners have put in place for their Allocations Policy and makes size eligibility standard throughout the Borough.

2.5 It is recommended that this adjustment to Policy be brought into effect from 1st April 2013

2.6 No equality issues have been identified in respect of the recommendation. The discretion available to the Head of Housing Options will enable case by case consideration where necessary (for example where medical or social need supports the need for an extra bedroom).

2.7 Under-occupation in social housing

The changes in Housing Benefit set out in 2.4 above also affect existing social and affordable housing tenants (under pensionable age). It is known that a minimum of 200 existing social and affordable housing tenants of working age will have deductions from Housing Benefit from April 2013 because they are under-occupying their property. It is also known that some tenants have two bedrooms in excess of Housing Benefit rules and these people will have a greater amount of their housing benefit award deducted. Work is progressing to identify and discuss options with those who are affected. Of those who are likely to lose housing benefit some will decide that they wish to move to smaller more affordable accommodation. In this context there is a need to increase the priority given to re-house those that are affected by these changes. In order to prioritise those with the highest deductions from their housing benefit entitlement it is recommended that 50 points be awarded for each under-occupied bedroom, to a maximum of 100 points.

3 Risk Assessment

3.1 There are potential risks associated with these changes. The likelihood of the event(s) occurring with controls is shown in brackets.

3.2 Professional (Operational)

Demand for two bedroom accommodation is likely to increase which could impact on the length of wait that households (homeless and housing register) face before being rehoused. This is considered to be a medium risk.

Demand for three bedroom accommodation will reduce because less households will be eligible once the new criteria is applied. However, the risk of this reduction in demand impacting on the let-ability of properties before the next Policy review in 2013/14 is considered to be low

3.3 Financial (Operational)

There is a risk that the number of void properties will increase as a result of existing Council Tenants moving to accommodation in accordance with the new size criteria. This is considered to be a medium risk.

4 Conclusion

4.1 These changes to the Policy deals with specific areas that need to be addressed now due to legal and administrative reasons.

Financial Services comments:	VOIDS rent loss and expenditure will be monitored closely during year.
Legal Services comments:	Contained in the report
Crime and Disorder	No direct implications
Equality and Diversity	No direct implications
Service Improvement Plan implications:	As set out in the body of this report
Corporate Plan:	This is a Service Plan item
Risk Assessment:	Medium-Low (see 3.0)
Background papers:	Policy Review, November 2010 Housing Board Statutory Instrument 2012 1869 and 2989
Appendices/Enclosures:	
Appendix 'A'	Consultation Results
Appendix 'B'	Housing Benefit room criteria and existing Policy provisions (for comparisons)
Report author/ Lead Officer:	Corinne Waterfield and Steve Newton

Appendix B

A) Housing Benefit bedroom criteria and family composition recommended to be adopted by the Gosport Scheme of Allocations

1. A bedroom is allocated for each of the following only up to a maximum of four bedrooms:
 1. Each lone parent or couple;
 2. Each other person aged 16+;
 3. Two children under 16 of the same sex;
 4. Two children under 10 of the same or opposite sex;
 5. Any other child.
2. Bedroom criteria for households assessed as needing excess bedrooms from above due to disability/carer needs is to be determined by the Councils medical and social priority assessment officer.

B) Current bedroom need assessment for the Gosport Scheme of Allocations.

ASSESSMENT OF HOUSEHOLD AND NUMBER OF BEDROOMS NEEDED

1. In general, the following provisions apply to the allocation of housing:
 - a. A single applicant or a couple will be allocated 1 bedroom;
 - b. Two single applicants, not living as a couple (but closely related), will be allocated 2 bedrooms;
 - c. A single applicant or couple with 1 child will be allocated 2 bedrooms;
 - d. A single applicant or couple with 2 children will be allocated 3 bedrooms;
 - e. A single applicant or couple with 3 children will be allocated 3 bedrooms;
 - f. A single applicant or couple with 4 children of the same sex, or 4 children 2 of each sex will be allocated 3 bedrooms;
 - g. A single applicant or couple with 4 children, 3 of one sex, one of the other, will be allocated 4 bedrooms;
 - h. A single applicant or couple with 5 or more children will be allocated 4 bedrooms;
 - i. All transfer applicants occupying three or four bedroom properties are permitted, at customer request only, to be eligible for a move to properties one bedroom in excess of need; provided the move releases a property with more bedrooms than the property allocated.