

SUBJECT:	<i>Bucks Home Choice - Review of Allocations Policy</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Cabinet Portfolio: Healthy Communities</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Head of Healthy Communities – Martin Holt</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Housing Manager – Michael Veryard (01494 732200 E-mail:mveryard@chiltern.gov.uk)</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>Not Ward Specific</i>

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to allow Members to view and comment on the proposed revisions to the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy ahead of the full consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the Cabinet considers the proposed revisions to the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy and comments as appropriate.**

- 2. That the final version of the draft revised Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy be agreed for consultation by the Head of Healthy Communities in consultation with the Healthy Communities Portfolio Holder and subject to the agreement of Aylesbury Vale District Council, South Bucks District Council and Wycombe District Council.**

2. Executive Summary

Not required

3. Reasons for Recommendations

To allow Members to comment on the first draft of the revised Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy (which has been reviewed and updated to take account of current legislation, guidance and case law) and to then proceed to consultation once agreed by all four District Councils.

4. Content of Report

4.1 Bucks Home Choice is the choice based lettings scheme that is operated jointly by Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Councils for the allocation of social housing tenancies. Under the scheme, the Councils operate a common allocations policy for:

- assessing who qualifies for Bucks Home Choice,
- prioritising applicants based on their housing needs (using four priority bands ranging from A to D) and
- allocating vacant social housing tenancies.

The Councils also share a common database and IT system for recording applications, advertising tenancies and making allocations. However, within this common allocation policy and database each Council still operates its own housing register (i.e. Chiltern District Council operates its own housing register for applicants who qualify to be re-housed in Chiltern).

4.2 Bucks Home Choice has been operating since 2009 and the last major revision to the Allocations Policy was in 2014. The Scheme Management Board (which comprises representatives from all four districts) is now proposing to make a number of revisions to the Allocations Policy in response to:

- case law and ombudsman decisions relating to allocations policies,
- new national legislation and guidance (particularly the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) and
- the experiences of the four Councils across the county in applying the Policy and managing the allocations process

4.3 The Scheme Management Board has reviewed the policy and made a number of proposed revisions. A table summarising the main revisions and changes being proposed and the reasons for them is in Appendix 1.

4.4 A copy of full draft revised Allocations Policy is in Appendix 2. At the time of writing, the draft policy was being reviewed by the Council's Principal Solicitor in consultation with the other District Councils and a further update will be given at the meeting.

4.5 The views of Members are sought on the proposed revisions to the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy. Following this, the draft policy will be finalised in agreement with the other three District Council partners and will then be subject to a formal countywide consultation process. This will consist of a 6 week consultation period whereby key stakeholders and partners (including applicants) will have the opportunity to consider the proposed changes and comment. Once the consultation process is completed, a final draft of the revised policy will be prepared and presented to Members to consider the consultation responses and draft for final approval and adoption.

5. Consultation

The proposed revised Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy will be subject to a formal countywide consultation process.

6. Options

6.1 The Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy could be left in its current form. However, this would create significant risks for Council:

- It would leave the Council vulnerable to legal challenge on some aspects of the Policy which have not been formally updated to reflect changes brought forward by legislation, guidance, case law and Ombudsman decisions.
- The current policy is no longer compatible with the Council's statutory homelessness duties following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Without the proposed revisions, the Council will face increasing challenges in meeting its statutory homelessness duties and preventing homelessness wherever possible (avoiding the need to provide costly temporary accommodation).
- Other aspects of the policy which would benefit from updating will be left unchanged.

6.2 The proposed revisions will mean that the Policy will be more robust in responding to any challenges and fit for purpose in meeting the current legislative housing requirements

7. Corporate Implications

7.1 Financial

There will be costs associated with undertaking the consultation on the proposed revisions to the Policy and implementing any changes to policy (including IT changes) as and when the final policy is adopted. These costs will be shared across the four District Councils and provision for these costs has been included in the Council's budgetary estimates.

7.2 Legal

It is a statutory requirement for the Council to have an Allocations Policy for social housing.

7.3 Equalities Act 2010

An Equalities Impact Assessment of the policy will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

1. Delivering cost-effective, customer-focussed services
2. Working towards safe and healthier communities

9. Next Step

The draft revised Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy will be finalised and issued for consultation.

Background Papers:	None other than the legislation, policies and guidance referred to in this report.
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