



Report to Leader (Housing & Homelessness portfolio)

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| Decision Date: | 29 April 2021 |
| Reference number: | HH01.21 |
| Title: | Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy Proposed Minor Delegated Changes |
| Relevant councillor(s): | Cllr Martin Tett, Leader of Buckinghamshire Council and Cllr Isobel Darby |
| Author and/or contact officer: | Sonia Crawford / Michael Veryard |
| Ward(s) affected: | all |
| Recommendations: | That minor changes as follows are made: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Amending the Local Connection criteria to allow that care leavers who are registered for re-housing under the protocol will be able to bid for properties in any of the former four district areas.2. Amending the Priority Band criteria so that a care leaver moving from Band D up to Band B does <u>not</u> have their priority date re-set. |
| Reason for decision: | To progress minor changes for the benefit of looked after children in advance of Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy review, due to conclude toward the end of 2021. |

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 A Care Leaver Protocol is currently in place between the Council's Children's Service and Housing Service in order to support looked after children to register for social housing in a timely manner and potentially secure a tenancy when they are ready to leave care. The aim is to ensure that looked after children get enhanced priority for rehousing when they are ready to live independently. The Council's current social

housing allocations scheme is Bucks Home Choice which has been carried forward from the former District Councils and retains a district area-based local connection requirement. Under the current Care Leaver Protocol, children looked after by Buckinghamshire Council's Childrens Service can register for Bucks Home Choice, with their local connection being defined as the district area within the authority in which they were taken into care from. As such young people are not usually able to seek housing within the other former district areas under the current policy and protocol arrangements (eg a care leaver who was taken into care from the former Aylesbury Vale district will only be able to apply for social housing in the Aylesbury Vale area).

- 1.2 The length of time spent registered on the Bucks Home Choice scheme is one factor that is taken into account when determining priority for re-housing. Looked after children of Buckinghamshire Council are invited to register for social housing when they reach 16, accruing waiting time. When they reach 18 and are assessed and confirmed that they are ready to move on, they are awarded enhanced priority on the housing register (Band B), as laid out in the Care Leaver Protocol and in the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy. Presently when this enhanced priority date is achieved the Policy dictates that the priority date be amended to the date the additional banding is awarded. Thus the benefit of waiting time is lost.
- 1.3 The recommended changes in this report have been identified to support Buckinghamshire Council in meeting its Corporate Parenting responsibilities and to improve the prospects that young people leaving care are able to secure accommodation at the appropriate time in order to achieve a successful transition into adulthood and independent living.
- 1.4 Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy is currently subject to review to bring forward a new Buckinghamshire Council Allocations Policy. The transitional orders dictate that this must be in place prior to 31 March 2022. However, interim minor changes are being brought forward pending the completion of the full review where it is identified that this changes will immediately improve elements of service delivery. It is considered that the changes proposed in this report bring forward changes in advance of the whole policy review.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 When considering local connection and the forthcoming changes to the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy, it is considered that bringing forward these minor changes in advance will better support our Care Leaver Offer and their transition into housing.
- 2.2 Where this minor change is implemented the outcome will allow young persons under the protocol to be deemed to have a Buckinghamshire-wide local connection

and therefore broaden their potential search for housing to anywhere within the Buckinghamshire Council area regardless of where the young person was taken in care from

- 2.3 The purpose of early registration was for young people to be able to accumulate waiting time on the housing register. However, this purpose is nullified in the current policy if we then reset the priority date when young people are awarded additional priority when they are ready for independent living.
- 2.4 As such the recommendation proposes that when an applicant is a current or former “looked after” child who has been moved into a higher banding under the terms of the Buckinghamshire Leaving Care Protocol as ready for independent living, the priority date of the banding will not be amended when the applicant moves into this higher banding. This will ensure that care leavers are prioritised according to the initial date of their registration and priority banding, resulting in them being housed faster, subject to vacant properties.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 By introducing these changes now, the Council can immediately improve the Care Leaver offer and improve the prospects of care leavers securing accommodation in a timely manner. Alternatively, the Council could look at making these changes in the whole policy review that is currently underway. This will see a delay to the changes and potentially some financial implications on budgets in the meantime if it results in longer timescales for care leavers being rehoused.

4. Legal, financial and equalities implications

- 4.1 Ideally consultation is required to make changes, but given the pending wider review, and the fact that the change is of a small nature, and has obvious benefits, it is not considered necessary
- 4.2 In terms of financial implications the cost of implementing changes is nil but the changes themselves may result in a wider saving to Childrens services budget where care leavers are accommodated more swiftly via the housing register.
- 4.3 We have considered the equalities impact of the changes and the proposal is not considered to disadvantage particular groups.

5. Corporate implications

5.1 There are no significant corporate implications identified.

6. Consultation with local councillors & community boards

6.1 Officers do not consider a wider consultation to be required but Cllr Isobel Darby has been consulted and is supportive of the proposed changes.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

7.1 Communication has taken place internally with Service Directors of Childrens Services and Housing and Regulatory Services as a part of a cross sector improvement project.

8. Next steps and review

8.1 Where changes are agreed and the attached appendix policy wording changes are accepted the revised policy will be amended and published onto the Bucks Home Choice Website and as appropriate. Any associated procedural changes remain internal. This will be undertaken without delay.

9. Background papers

9.1 Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy.

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 585210 or email sonia.crawford@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

