



## Report to Leader (Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services portfolio))

<b>Date:</b>	<b>28 March 2022</b>
<b>Reference number:</b>	<b>HR03.22</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Buckinghamshire Council Allocations Policy</b>
<b>Cabinet Member(s):</b>	<b>Councillor Nick Naylor - Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services</b>
<b>Contact officer:</b>	<b>Michael Veryard</b>
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	None specific
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>That Buckinghamshire Council formally adopts the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Scheme as the Council's housing allocations scheme (under section 166A of Housing Act 1996)</b>
<b>Reason for decision:</b>	<b>The recommended option will ensure that the Council has its named Allocations Scheme in place and is compliant with the Transitional Regulations which require that a Buckinghamshire Council Allocations Scheme is in place by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.</b>

### **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 Buckinghamshire Council currently operates the Bucks Home Choice scheme for the allocation of social housing tenancies. The Transitional Regulations linked to the creation of the Unitary Authority require that Buckinghamshire Council must have its own Housing Allocations Scheme in place by 1/4/2022 (two years after vesting day). Therefore, it is recommended that the Council adopts the current Bucks Home Choice scheme as its Housing Allocations Scheme (with minor amendments to update terminology and references) by 1/4/2022 and then undertakes a full review of the scheme during 2022/23.

## **2. Content of report**

- 2.1 Buckinghamshire Council currently operates the Bucks Home Choice scheme for the allocation of social housing tenancies. This is a choice based lettings system whereby applicants on the Housing Register can bid for tenancies that are advertised on a weekly cycle. Social housing tenancies are owned and managed by Registered Providers (aka housing associations) and the Council will nominate tenants to a provider via the Bucks Home Choice process. The Bucks Home Choice Allocations Scheme sets down who qualifies to register for the scheme and how applicants are assessed and prioritised for re-housing.
- 2.2 The existing Bucks Home Choice Allocations Scheme was carried forward from the former District Councils to the new Buckinghamshire Council from vesting day under the Transitional Arrangements Regulations and has continued to operate on the same basis as it did prior to vesting day. The Regulations require that Buckinghamshire Council must have its own Housing Allocations Scheme in place by 1/4/2022 (two years after vesting day). Therefore, it is recommended that the Council adopts the current Housing Allocations Scheme in order to meet the requirements of the Transitional Arrangements Regulations by 1/4/2022. A full review of the Allocations Scheme will be undertaken during 2022. Further details and background information are set down in the following paragraphs.
- 2.3 Buckinghamshire Council has a statutory duty to operate an Allocations Scheme (under Section 166A of the Housing Act 1996) for the allocation of social housing tenancies within its area. This is often referred to as the Housing Waiting List or Housing Register policy and sets down:
- Who qualifies for a social housing tenancy
  - How they are prioritised for tenancies
  - How tenancies are allocated when they become available
- 2.4 The Council's current Allocations Scheme is Bucks Home Choice. The Bucks Home Choice Scheme was established jointly by the four former District Councils in 2009. This meant that from 2009, the four former District Councils operated under a single Allocations Scheme determining who qualifies for social housing and how qualifying applicants were then assessed and prioritised. This has operated using a single common database and IT system. Each District Council maintained its own district Housing Register (aka waiting list) within the policy. An applicant needed to have a local connection to the district concerned in order to qualify for that district's waiting list (e.g. only applicants with a local connection to Chiltern district could apply for tenancies in Chiltern etc.). Typically, an applicant must have lived or worked in a district for at least 2 years in order to have a local connection there. The scheme does allow for some exceptions to this. Following the move to the

Buckinghamshire Council, the Allocations Scheme has continued to operate on this basis.

- 2.5 The Bucks Home Choice Allocations Scheme has been subject to several reviews since it was first implemented. The current version was formally adopted on 1st October 2019 after an extensive review of the scheme, legal requirements and a full public consultation.
- 2.6 In accordance with the Transitional Arrangements Regulations, the existing Bucks Home Choice Allocations Scheme was carried forward to the new Buckinghamshire Council from Vesting Day on 1/4/2020. Currently, the scheme continues to operate on the same basis as previously by incorporating four Housing Registers based on the former legacy district administrative areas and still applying legacy district local connection requirements for each of the four Registers.
- 2.7 The Transitional Arrangements Regulations require that Buckinghamshire Council must have its own Housing Allocations Scheme in place by 1/4/2022 which is two years on from vesting day. In order to meet this requirement, it is proposed that Buckinghamshire Council formally adopts the current Bucks Home Choice Housing Allocations Scheme. A copy of the full Allocations Scheme is attached as an Appendix. Some minor amendments have been made to the policy wording to reflect the move to the single unitary Buckinghamshire Council and replace references to the legacy District Councils. These amendments have been highlighted in yellow
- 2.8 Democratic Services have confirmed that the Housing Allocations Scheme can be adopted by a Leader Decision because (i) it does not fall under the Housing Strategy umbrella and (ii) there are no major changes being suggested to the Scheme. No consultation is required as no significant changes are being proposed to the scheme. A Leader Decision was used previously in 2021 to make minor amendments to the Scheme in order to provide more flexibility for the rehousing of care leavers into social housing.
- 2.9 A full review of the Housing Allocations Scheme will be undertaken during 2022 that will look at all aspects of the scheme including qualification, local connection criteria and the prioritisation of applicants. The full review will allow us to consider how the scheme can best reflect the Council's key priorities going forward, including key worker housing needs and the opportunities for care service clients to secure social housing. It will be cross cutting across Council service areas and workstreams, including Children's and Adult's Services, domestic abuse services and our work with armed forces veterans and their families. The review will be subject to a full consultation process and will result in a revised policy being brought forward to Council for consideration later in 2022.

### **3. Other options considered**

- 3.1 The Council could continue to operate the current Bucks Home Choice scheme without taking any action to formally adopt it as the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme. However, if the Council does not adopt a Buckinghamshire Council Allocations Policy by 1/4/2022 then it will not be meeting the requirements of the Transitional Regulations.

### **4. Legal and financial implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report as the operation of the Housing Allocations Scheme will continue in its current form with no change or additional costs involved.
- 4.2 There are no legal implications as no changes are being made to the operational aspects of the Allocations Scheme. The position regarding the requirements of the Transitional Regulations is set down in the report.

### **5. Corporate implications**

- 5.1 This report links to the Council's Corporate Priorities for Strengthening our Communities and Protecting the Vulnerable. There are no wider Corporate Implications at this stage because no changes are being made to how the Allocations Scheme currently operates.

### **6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views**

- 6.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services has been consulted on this matter. No wider consultation has taken place with local councillors and community boards because no changes are being proposed to the operational aspects of the Housing Allocations Scheme. Full consultation will be undertaken when the full scheme review takes place during 2022/23.

### **7. Communication, engagement & further consultation**

- 7.1 No wider consultation has taken place with local councillors and community boards because no changes are being proposed to the operational aspects of the Housing Allocations Scheme. Full consultation will be undertaken when the full scheme review takes place during 2022/23.

### **8. Next steps and review**

- 8.1 The Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy will be adopted as the Council's Housing Allocations Policy via a Leader Decision.

8.2 A full review of the Allocations Policy will then be undertaken during 2022/23 to look at all aspects of the scheme and assess what amendments and changes the Council may wish to make in consultation with key stakeholders and the public.

## **9. Background papers**

9.1 None

## **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 email [democracy@buckingshire.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckingshire.gov.uk).

