

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK

RECORD OF DECISION TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

This is a record of a decision taken by the officers under delegated powers and where necessary taken in consultation with members and officers.

Delegated Power

The Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for housing has delegated authority to make minor amendments to the Social Housing Allocations Policy (CAB217 2013/14). 7 May 2013

In 2013 delegated authority was taken to clarify the policy by the paragraph

'Those applicants with no local connection to the Borough will not be admitted to the Register. The qualifying period for the establishment of a local connection for the purposes of this policy should be 3 years residence in the Borough. Those that are in priority needs and the Council owes or will owe a duty to because they are homeless or their homelessness is inevitable will also be considered to have a local connection'

Decision Taken

Following a review of 12 months operation of the Social Housing Allocations Policy it is proposed that the paragraph above be replaced as follows

Those applicants with no local connection to the Borough will not be admitted to the Register.

1. The qualifying period for establishment of a local connection for the purposes of this policy should be residence in the Borough for at least 3 out of the last 5 years.
2. Those that are in priority need and this Council/BCKLWN owes or will owe a duty to because they are homeless or their homelessness is inevitable will be considered to have a local connection
3. You will also be deemed to have a local connection if you have close family (parents, children or siblings) who have lived in the Borough for at least 5 years and for which evidence will be required.'

For those applicants who qualify under criteria 3, the banding awarded to the application will be one banding less than that which would be awarded to applicants with similar housing needs satisfying conditions 1 or 2.

The paragraphs in red indicate the additions to the Policy.

Reasons for the Decision

To respond to a review of issues arising in first year of Policy, Government Guidance and Policies of neighbouring authorities in particular relating to

- Local Housing Need Schemes and potential conflict in policies
- Households who have moved outside the area
- Households with close family in the area
- Low demand for properties in some areas

See attached report at Appendix 1.

Options considered

1. To leave the policy unchanged

This would not address the concerns which have been identified through the review of the first year of operation of the revised allocations policy.

Any declarations of interest and details of any dispensations granted in respect of interests.

None

Authorisation

Signature

RAY HARDING

Date

18-08-2014

Consultation with members/officers

If the decision is taken following consultation with the members/officers, please give details:
Signed by Member as consulted:

Date

18-8-2014



Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment

Name of policy/service/function	Social Housing Allocations Policy				
Is this a new or existing policy/ service/function?	Existing				
Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened. Please state if this policy/service rigidly constrained by statutory obligations	The Equality Impact Assessment recently completed for this Policy is still relevant and is attached				
Question	Answer				
<p>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age			X	
	Disability			X	
	Gender			X	
	Gender Re-assignment			X	
	Marriage/civil partnership			X	
	Pregnancy & maternity			X	
	Race			X	
	Religion or belief			X	
	Sexual orientation			X	
Other (eg low income)			X		
Question	Answer	Comments			
2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?	No				
3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	No				
4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	No				
<p>5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section</p>	No	Actions:			
		Actions agreed by EWG member:			
Assessment completed by:					
Name SHEILA FALLEY					
Job title HOUSING SERVICES OPERATIONS MANAGER	Date 15-05-14				

Please Note: If there are any positive or negative impacts identified in question 1, or there any 'yes' responses to questions 2 – 4 a full impact assessment will be required.

REVIEW OF WEST NORFOLK HOMECHOICE POLICY AUGUST 2014

Suggested action

Following review of the first year of the new Social Housing Allocations Policy and consideration of DCLG guidance on local connection and allocation policies of neighbouring authorities it is proposed that the following amendments be made to existing policy.

The paragraph agreed under delegated authority reference XX be deleted and a revised paragraph to be inserted in relation to local connection:

Those applicants with no local connection to the Borough will not be admitted to the Register.

1. The qualifying period for establishment of a local connection for the purposes of this policy should be residence in the Borough for at least **3 out of the last 5 years** .
2. Those that are in priority need and **this** Council owes or will owe a duty to because they are homeless or their homelessness is inevitable will be considered to have a local connection
3. **You will also be deemed to have a local connection if you have close family (parents, children or siblings) who have lived in the Borough for at least 5 years and for which evidence will be required.'**

For those applicants who qualify under criteria 3, the banding awarded to the application will be one banding less than that which would be awarded to applicants WITH SIMILAR HOUSING NEEDS satisfying conditions 1 or 2.

The paragraphs in red indicate the additions to the Policy.

Review of issues arising from 1 July 2013 to 1 July 2014

As at 1 July 2013 when the new Social Housing Allocations policy was introduced, 5,966 household were on the Housing Register. At the end of April 2014, it was 2,687. The overwhelming majority of those removed from the register comprises of those not placing any bids or making any other contact for over 6 months.

There have been 89 written appeals (as at 06/06/14) from those existing or new applicants not meeting the new local connection criteria. Some of these appeals have been accepted on welfare grounds once further information has been supplied.

There have been a much less significant number of appeals from those denied access to the register because they have income, savings or equity in property in excess of one third of the average suitable property price in the district.

The number of requests for additional priority on medical grounds has declined slightly; the average number of requests per month has dropped from 36 per month for the year 2012/13 to 32 per month from July 2013 to the end of May 2014.

There is a conflict between the local connection eligibility criteria for the housing register and the local connection criteria for preference for vacancies arising on Rural Housing Exception site schemes.

We currently have RHE schemes on the fringes of the Borough at Burnham Overy Staithe, East Rudham, Feltwell, Great Massingham, Hockwold and South Creak. There are also new-build properties at Outwell and Castle Acre to be completed in the not too distant future.

Several applicants have lost their local connection to the district by moving into another local authority area whilst still retaining strong links to the village they originated from. They have moved into privately rented accommodation that is available and more affordable but still close to their family or employment. This is particularly the case for those on the fringes of the Borough who have obtained accommodation in Brandon, Fakenham or Wisbech.

There is low demand for some properties. Some property types and locations have been more difficult to let for many years e.g. Monks Close, Bircham Newton, three-bedroom first floor maisonettes at North Lynn and some sheltered schemes. There has been a need to advertise some bungalows in rural locations on more than one occasion to achieve a let.

Low demand does not relate just to changes to Housing Register but other factors such as the impacts of welfare reform and for increased expectation in relation to sheltered accommodation, may be equally important factors in reducing demand.

Background information

DCLG guidance on local connection

The DCLG's document of October 2013 'Providing social housing for local people' 'Strengthening statutory guidance on social housing allocations' contains the sections below relating to qualification for social housing:-

8. We know that some local authorities have already decided to include a residency test as part of their qualification criteria for social housing, requiring people to have lived in the area for a certain amount of time before they can go on the waiting list we believe that this is entirely appropriate and we want to ensure that all local authorities adopt such an approach. We consider that a reasonable period of residency would be at least two years. We therefore propose that the new guidance should strongly encourage all local authorities to adopt a two year residency test as part of their qualification criteria.

9. However, we recognise that people may have a local connection to an area even if they do not currently live there or have not lived there for long enough. Accordingly, we propose that the guidance should also encourage local authorities to consider adopting other qualification criteria alongside a residency test so that people who are able to demonstrate a strong association to the local area are not disadvantaged.

10. Examples of criteria demonstrating a strong local association might include:

- Family association – for example, where the applicant has close family who live in the district and who have done so for a minimum period of time*
- Employment in the district – for example, where the applicant or member of their household is currently employed in the district and has worked there for a certain number of years*

Local connection policies of adjoining Councils

As part of the 12 month review we have considered the local connection policies of adjoining councils which are as follows

Breckland

- Living in the district for 3 years
- Lived in the district for 3 out of the last 5 years
- Permanent work in the district
- Close family living in district for more than 3 years

North Norfolk

- Living in the district for more than 6 months
- Living in the district for 3 out of the last 5 years
- Family member living in the district for at least 5 years

Forest Heath and East Cambs

- Living in the district for more than 6 months
- Lived in the district for 3 out of the last 5 years
- Working a minimum of 16 hours per week in the district
- Family (parents, son, daughter, brothers or sisters) who have lived in the district for 5 years or more. Other close family ties considered on a case by case basis

South Holland (award additional priority to those considered to have a connection)

- Living in the district for more than 6 months
- Previously lived in the district for 12 months continuously at any time
- Adult relatives (children, parents, sisters, brothers) who have been resident for 3 out of the last 5 years