

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

17 APRIL 2025

**REPORT OF
CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing – Councillor Richard Eglington

COMMON ALLOCATION POLICY (Tees Valley Lettings Partnership)

SUMMARY

The members of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership include Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees borough councils, Beyond Housing and North Star. The partners work collaboratively to let social and affordable rent properties in accordance with an agreed Common Allocation Policy (CAP). The CAP details how people register and bid for homes through the Partnership's choice-based lettings platform (Tees Valley Home Finder).

Faced with rising demand for social/affordable rented housing, it is essential that the CAP remains relevant, adheres to national policy and, vitally, meets our local housing needs. To ensure we have a policy that is fair, clear and helps those who need social/affordable housing most, the Partnership has recently undertaken a review of the current CAP. The review was informed by consultation with applicants registered on Tees Valley Home Finder, key partners and stakeholders. Following the conclusion of the CAP consultation exercise, Members are asked to approve the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION/DECISION

Whilst the Council is not a stock-holding local authority, we are required to operate an Allocation Policy and a housing register. In Stockton-on-Tees, we operate a CAP and housing register in partnership with Middlesbrough Council, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Beyond Housing North Star (the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership members). All members of the Partnership are committed to working collaboratively to ensure a fair and transparent Common Allocation Policy. The recent CAP review was undertaken to ensure that the housing needs of residents across the boroughs of Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees are met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to:

1. Note the recent consultation exercise recently undertaken to inform an updated Tees Valley Common Allocation Policy (as detailed in paragraphs 4-6 of this report) and approve the proposed new Common Allocation Policy (**Appendix A**).

DETAIL

Background

1. As noted previously the Council is a member of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership and collectively we operate a CAP and housing register and digital lettings platform, [Tees Valley Home Finder](#). Tees Valley Homefinder is an online web portal allowing those seeking accommodation in our borough to register and 'bid' for housing. The two Registered Provider Partnership members (Beyond and North Star) advertise/let their properties through this route, whilst a further 12 Registered Providers are signatories to a Nomination Agreement. These Registered Providers advertise / let a minimum of 50% of their vacant rented properties via the Tees Valley Homefinder platform.
2. Demand for social/affordable rented housing has increased significantly over recent months with property availability not matching this growing demand (as summarised below). It is against this backdrop that the CAP review has been undertaken, with the aim of maximising the council's ability to best address our local and prioritised housing need:

Housing Register:

- The number of applicants joining the housing register has increased by 16% since the beginning of 2024/25 2713 applicants as of April 2024, rising to 3164 as at end of Qu. 3 2024-25).

Average Number of properties advertised as available for letting:

- Whilst the weekly number of properties does fluctuate, between April 2024 to the end of Qu. 3 2024-25 the average number of advertised properties per week was 16.

CAP Policy review / consultation

3. As noted above the CAP policy review was initiated to ensure that the Council is best placed to support those with the greatest housing need, however it was also timely to ensure the policy is compliant with recent changes in national policy (for example the Government's commitment to ensure appropriate support and housing priority is given to our Armed Forces communities including veterans; those who have experienced domestic abuse and young care leavers) and importantly also responds to customer feedback.
4. An internal review of the CAP (undertaken by representatives of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership) identified several potential changes which the consultation exercise subsequently sought views on. The consultation questions are detailed on pages 18-31 of the CAP Consultation Report (**Appendix B**) and sought views on 12 proposed changes (summarised below):
 - i. Local connection: to strengthen the requirement to have a local connection to one of the three partner local authority areas to be eligible to join the Housing Register.
 - o The updated narrative is detailed on page 9 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
 - ii. Serious cases of anti-social behaviour: due to the significant impact this has on communities, there is to be an increase in the length of exclusion from the Housing Register from 12 to 36 months.
 - o The updated narrative is detailed on page 11 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).

- iii. Regular review of applicants with a banding priority: with the potential to remove a priority banding if suitable properties have been advertised and the applicant has failed to place a bid.
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 21 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
- iv. Loss of home due to demolition: introduction of a new *Band 1 plus* to be given to those on the Housing Register who are losing their home due to demolition.
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 16 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
- v. HM Armed Forces Community: introduction of a new *Band 1 plus* for those leaving the armed forces communities with an urgent need for housing (the award of this banding will be made by Local Authority Homelessness Teams).
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 17 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
- vi. Homeless households: to be awarded a *Band 1* (applicants owned a main duty and are resident in temporary accommodation), *Band 2* (applicants owned a prevention or relief duty) or *Band 3* (applicants who have been determined as intentionally homeless and/or those with no priority need). In all instances the local authority Homelessness Teams will make the assessment to ensure compliance with homelessness legislation.
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 17, 19 and 21 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**)
- vii. Care Leavers: for young people leaving the care of the Local Authority who have been assessed as ready for independent living to be awarded a *Band 1*.
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 17 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**)
- viii. The introduction of a new Emergency Medical: for those applicants with an emergency housing need which is being exacerbated by their current housing situation (for example people discharged from hospital where their current housing is unsuitable / cannot be made suitable through property adaptations), to be awarded a *Band 1*.
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 17 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
- ix. Child Protection: a new category will be introduced where there is evidence of a serious threat to the well-being of a child and their accommodation is a significant contributory factor in the risk will be awarded *Band 1*.
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 18) of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
- x. Adoptive parents or prospective adoptive parents/foster carers currently living in unsuitable accommodation: category to be expanded to include 'specialist guardianship', to be awarded a *Band 2*.
 - The updated narrative is detailed on page 19 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).

- xi. Overcrowding: a new category of 'acute overcrowding' to be introduced in instances where an applicant is severely overcrowded requiring 2 or more additional bedrooms, a *Band 2* will be awarded. Overcrowding by 1 bedroom will continue to secure a Band 3.
 - o The updated narrative is detailed on page 19 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
 - xii. Senior Management Discretion: whilst the majority of allocations will be made in accordance with the CAP scheme banding rules, there will be *exceptional circumstances* which does not fit into the banding categories.
 - o The updated narrative is detailed on page 22 of the proposed new CAP (**Appendix A**).
5. The proposed changes were subject to a 6-week consultation exercise (undertaken between 7.10.24 to 18.11.24) with the consultation exercise promoted by:
- Making direct contact with all applicants with a live Tees Valley Home Finder application (at or during the time the consultation was undertaken). In total 8409 contacts were made across the 3 local authority areas (via email and/or letter).
 - Making direct contact with a range of partner organisations including VCSE sector partners, 15 Registered Provider, local elected members in the three local authorities, local MP's and internal colleagues.
 - Promoting the online consultation via the 5 partner websites.
6. In total 682 consultation responses were received, the majority of which (597) were from residents living within the Tees Valley Housing Partnership areas, page 4 of **Appendix B** provides a breakdown of consultation replies. As **Appendix B** details all consultation proposals were supported by the majority of those responded. Following analysis of consultation replies (both the questions and open narrative replies) no further changes to the policy are proposed other than those consulted on.
7. Following consideration of the consultation replies Cabinet is asked to approve the new Tees Valley CAP (**Appendix A**).

Next steps / timeline for implementation

8. All partners within the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership are seeking approval for the new CAP from their respective decision-making bodies and it is anticipated that the new policy will be implemented late June/early July 2025.
9. To ensure a smooth transition to the new CAP a detailed Project Delivery Plan will be implemented which includes for example, further communication with potentially affected customers*, training and information updates for internal teams and wider partner colleagues. Once a final implementation date has been agreed, all ward members, local MPs and wider partner organisations will also be contacted.

*Cabinet are asked to note that all applicants with a live application at the date the new CAP is introduced will not have a banding reduced, the banding will remain for the period the application is live and there is no change in the applicants circumstances. However there may be instances where current live applicants may potentially secure a higher banding i.e. for acute over-crowding / young people leaving care. Work is ongoing to identify these potential applicants to ensure their banding is revised to as close as possible to the new CAP implementation date.

All new applicants made after the date the new CAP is formally implemented will be banded according to the new assessment criteria.

EQUALITY & POVERTY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10. An Equality and Poverty, Impact Assessment (EPIA) has been completed to ensure that the Council is following its legal duties and that we are promoting equality and diversity within the Councils decision-making processes. The conclusion of the EPIA is that the proposed new CAP will not have a potential and/or differential impact on the needs of specific groups, including those who possess a protected characteristic.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

11. As the report identifies additional priority will be given to young people leaving the care of the Council who are ready to move onto independent living.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. None in this instance.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. In accordance with the Housing Act 1996, housing authorities must have a social housing allocations scheme, regardless of whether they own housing stock. This scheme determines how individuals and families are prioritised for social rented housing. This housing allocation process must be done in a fair, equitable, transparent and consistent way and prioritises applicants that are most in need

RISK ASSESSMENT

14. A risk assessment has been undertaken and is categories as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

15. All ward members were notified and given the opportunity to respond to the recent Tees Valley Common Allocation Policy consultation exercise.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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