

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 19 October 2023
REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adults
PORTFOLIO: Adult Social Care
SUBJECT: Amended Allocations Policy
WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The Report is to inform Executive Board of the amendments to the Property Pool Plus (PPP) Allocations policy.

The aspiration remains that the Local Authorities continue to facilitate a single lettings approach for scheme partners and customers when allocating and letting social housing across the city region. The PPP Policy was approved in March 2022, however, further amendments have been made to ensure the policy is current and meets legislative guidelines.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That**

- 1) the report be noted; and**
- 2) the Board approve the amended Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 A report was submitted to Executive Board in February 2011, to approve the Common Choice Based Lettings and Allocations Policy for the 5 participating Local Authorities. The allocations scheme has been known as the Property Pool Plus scheme (PPP) and is a partnership between the aforementioned local housing authorities, plus numerous private registered providers of social housing. PPP provides a common procedure and approach to allocating social rented housing, using a choice-based method to let homes.

3.1.2 PPP provides a single point of access for customers/applicants to apply for social housing, complete a single application process, and join a single housing register. It also provides local authorities with a single means to provide nominations, including for homeless applicants. This requires the participation of all, or the vast majority, of housing associations, and their willingness to let their available properties via PPP. The aspiration remains that the local authorities continue to facilitate a single lettings approach for scheme partners and customers when allocating and letting social housing across the city region.

3.1.3 Property Pool Plus (PPP) is a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings social housing

allocation scheme covering the local authority areas of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral. The PPP service went 'live' in July 2012, following the introduction of a suitable IT system (provided by Civica).

- 3.1.4 The participating local authorities and housing associations wish to ensure that the allocations policy is fit for purpose and supports strategic city region wide aspirations around access to social housing. Some of the principal drivers for undertaking a policy review include ensuring that the policy:
- Is legally compliant with relevant Government legislation, in particular the recent introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, Codes of Guidance, statutory obligations and also has regard to best practice and current case law;
 - Incorporates aims and principles which remain appropriate and relevant;
 - Helps support and deliver good customer service and
 - outcomes and ensures any proposed changes improve the customer journey;
 - Supports wider system change for homeless people, maximising the number of people in housing need who are successfully housed;
 - Is informed by housing association partner organisation's operational and business needs, in order to promote current and future co-operation and participation in the allocation scheme.
- 3.1.5 The Property Pool Plus (PPP) Housing Allocations Scheme which is administered across the five Local Authority areas of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, and Wirral has recently undergone a review process in line with statutory requirements for Social Housing Allocations.
- 3.1.6 One of the review recommendations was for the PPP scheme to implement a revised Housing Allocations policy, which was subsequently drafted, consulted upon, and approved for adoption by all five scheme member Local Authorities in spring / summer 2022.
- 3.2 **Policy Changes**
The revised policy incorporates a significant number of changes to various elements of the scheme including the qualification, criteria and the priority banding system.
- 3.2.1 The banding priority system will be reduced from six bands to four. Band A will remain a high priority banding for priority clients, e.g. homelessness, health and welfare etc.
- 3.2.2 A procurement exercise was therefore undertaken which completed in September 2022. This resulted in the existing IT provider being re-contracted to supply an upgraded version of the existing IT system which is being configured to meet the specific requirements to administer the revised policy.
- 3.2.3 The upgraded system will also offer an improved customer experience with the addition of a module for customers to interrogate property availability by area including indicative waiting times, a communications module for customers to view

correspondence sent to them, and a document upload facility to allow customers to upload verification documentation and supporting evidence direct to their accounts.

3.3 **Project Timescales**

The key dates and timescale for each of the main elements of the IT implementation are set out in the table below:

Element	Projected Timescale
Configuration completed	25/05/2023
IT Development	July and August 2023
User Acceptance Testing	04/09/2023 to 13/10/2023
IT delivery preparation	16/10/2023 to 03/11/2023
New Policy and IT Launch	Monday 06/11/2023

3.4 **Change Preparation**

3.4.1 In addition to the work on the IT development, the PPP Local Authorities and Scheme Administrators have begun planning and preparing for the transition.

3.4.2 There is a need to ensure that the existing data currently held within the IT system is as accurate and up to date as possible in relation to housing register applications, property adverts and associated shortlists, before the launch of the revised scheme to assist with a smooth transition.

3.4.3 There will be an additional requirement to re-assess existing housing applications against the revised policy criteria, which will involve gathering additional data for some cases, notifying applicants of the outcome of any change to their status for rehousing, and providing information and support to those who are impacted by the change.

3.5 **Request for a pause in scheme activity**

3.5.1 Due to the scale of the change and required preparatory work, both the Local Authority representatives and Scheme Administrators are requesting approval for a break in some elements of the PPP scheme activity for a short period in the lead up to the launch of the revised scheme.

3.5.2 It is suggested that the scheme should be closed to new applications for a period of one month before the launch of the revised scheme. This will allow for staff resource to be diverted to dealing with the required preparation work and supporting customers, whilst at the same time this will present a clear definition to customers between the existing, and the revised scheme. Without such a pause there will be new applications being submitted under the existing rules, using the existing application form up until the day before the transition. These applicants would subsequently need to be contacted to collect additional data to allow their cases to be assessed under the revised scheme.

3.5.3 It is also recommended that there should be a two week period prior to the launch of the revised scheme where there will be a pause in property advertising. This will allow partner Housing Association landlords to spend time updating property

shortlists under the existing scheme rules. This recommendation is subject to discussion and approval by partner Housing Association landlords.

3.6 **Mitigation**

3.6.1 Whilst Local Authority representatives and Scheme Administrators are recommending a short pause in some scheme activity as described above there will be mechanisms in place for dealing with urgent rehousing cases, as follows:

- Communications via a robust marketing plan regarding the forthcoming changes including advice that contact should be made direct to Administration Teams and / or Homeless Teams for urgent housing need cases.
- Facility for a new application to be submitted by the back office i.e., by an Officer on behalf of the applicant in urgent situations.
- The facility to direct match properties to urgent cases will be made available.
- Shortlists for properties previously advertised will continue to be processed.

4.0 **POLICY CHANGES**

4.1 The social housing allocations scheme is a core service and the amended Allocations Policy and Procedures for Property Pool Plus are up-to-date and reflect the latest legislation.

4.2 LAs must adhere to the law regarding the allocation of Social Rented Housing, as set out in the Housing Act 1996, Part 6 Allocation of Housing Accommodation. Every local housing authority in England must have a scheme (their “allocation scheme”) for determining priorities and as to the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation. For this purpose “procedure” includes all aspects of the allocation process, including the persons or descriptions of persons by whom decisions are taken.”

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no resource implications arising from the recommendations of this report. There are existing revenue budgets in place to fund the operation of an allocations service, which is currently performed by Halton Housing. There is an existing revenue budget to fund the annual operation of an IT system.

5.2 There are no direct revenue costs arising from the recommendations of this report. The Review exercise was funded by the LCR Combined Authority.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL`S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

6.1.2 Protect the most vulnerable households, as many rely on accessing

suitable social housing to meet their housing needs.

6.1.3 Facilitate confident and resilient communities with the provision of suitable secure tenancies with social landlord's supports community stability.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**
None at this stage

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**
None at this stage

6.4 **A Safer Halton**
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
None at this stage

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 None at this stage.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The equality Implications have been identified and mitigated.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None at this stage.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

10.1

Document	Place of Inspection	Contract Officer
PPP Housing Allocations Policy. Housing Allocations Policy can be found at the Property Pool Plus website. https://www.propertypoolplus.org.uk/content/About/OurPolicies	Runcorn Town Hall	Principal Manager Homelessness