

REPORT TO: Health Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 24th September 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adult Services

PORTFOLIO: Health & Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Property Pool Plus (PPP) - Policy Amendments

WARD(S): Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information on the Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy and inform the Board of the recommendations for several amendments to be made to the PPP policy.
- 1.2 To provide background and rationale for the recommended policy amendments.
- 1.3 To further ensure that the policy is compliant with new legislation and to seek views, including any concerns with taking the recommendations forward to a 12-week formal consultation process.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) **The report and policy be noted;**
- 2) **Endorse the consultation process; and**
- 3) **Provide comment on the policy amendments as part of the consultation process.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 In 2020 the PPP partner scheme local authorities undertook a review of the jointly administered PPP housing allocations policy, which resulted in the approval and implementation of a revised PPP policy and upgraded IT system. The partner scheme local authorities implemented the revised policy in January 2024
- 3.2 Since the implementation of the policy, there has been a reasonable settling in period, allowing time for the partner local authorities to evaluate the new policy at scale. This has resulted in a recognition that further amendments need to be made to the policy including:
 - A range of wording changes to improve clarity, and to correct identified errors and inconsistencies.
 - Minor policy changes which will have a limited impact on a minority of applicants, but which will improve the local authority's ability to administer the policy and meet housing need more effectively.

- 3.3 Two significant changes which will have an impact on a substantial proportion of those applying for rehousing via the PPP scheme. The proposed changes are in direct response to the increased demand on the partner local authority homelessness services and associated temporary accommodation costs. If implemented these changes will assist the local authorities to manage the increased demand on their homelessness services more efficiently.
- 3.4 **Recommended Changes, rationale and Clarification.**
Following the implementation of the new policy, it has become apparent that there are many sections of the policy that need clarification, to ensure the wording is explicit and adequately detailed to fully describe the way the policy is applied in practice by the administering teams.
- 3.5 In addition to the above there are a small number of changes being proposed to make the policy easier to read and understand for all those accessing it
- 3.6 The proposed amendments for clarification purposes do not change the meaning of the policy or the way it is applied currently.
- 3.7 **Corrections**
There are a small number of changes which are corrections e.g. incorrect references, spelling, punctuation etc.
- 3.8 These proposed changes for correction purposes do not change the meaning of the policy or the way in which it is applied currently.
- 3.9 **Minor changes**
There are several minor changes identified that will improve the Policy in terms of the local authority's ability to administer the policy and meet housing need more effectively. These are detailed in the following points.
- 3.10 **Qualification - Section 17 Child in need cases.**
The existing qualification criteria disqualifies persons defined as a child in need as a result of a statutory assessment under the Children's Act 1989 section 17. The existing policy includes a stipulation that any protocol agreed between the local authority's Housing Services and Children's services will be taken into consideration when making qualification decisions about care leavers, but this does not currently extend to child in need applicants who are not care leavers.
- 3.11 The policy changes proposed will extend this provision to incorporate Section 17 children in need applicants who are not care leavers. This will enable local authority Housing Services and Children's Services to set up joint protocols to better manage and respond to the housing need of young people in the borough accessing these services.
- 3.12 **Qualification – Unacceptable behaviour.**
The existing policy includes scope to disqualify applicants who are unsuitable to be a tenant due to unacceptable behaviour which includes, reference to causing annoyance

or nuisance to staff carrying out housing management functions.

3.13

The proposed changes expand this criteria to include applicants where they or any member of their household has displayed abusive or threatening behaviour towards members of staff involved in the administration of the Property Pool Plus Scheme. The local authority partners do not anticipate that this will impact many applicants but recognise past incidents where there have been abusive or threatening behaviour toward PPP staff, which is considered serious enough to make an applicant unsuitable to be a tenant. This change will allow local authorities to disqualify such applicants until such time as they can demonstrate improved behaviour.

3.14

Qualification – Local connection

The proposed changes recommend that the policy criteria for local connection is expanded to make clear those who have been newly granted Refugee status and are owed a statutory Homeless Duty by one of the Scheme Local Authorities, as well as those placed in the area under the ‘Homes for Ukraine Scheme’ are exempt from the local connection criteria. This is in line with current processes as well as the local authority statutory responsibility to assist applicants in these situations.

3.15

Qualification - Care Leavers

The existing policy includes criteria around Care Leavers who are placed out of the borough but are owed a Duty by one of the local authority areas under the Children’s Act.

3.16

The existing policy wording allows for a continued local connection to the area up to age 21, or 25 if they are pursuing a programme of education agreed in their pathway plan. This criteria have been extended to age 25 regardless of education. This change is in line with the local authority statutory parenting responsibility.

3.17

Qualification – Savings exemption.

A new disregard criteria to the savings threshold is being proposed for those who are ready to be discharged from hospital / residential care but are unable to do so as their current home is unsuitable for their needs to the extent that they would be at risk in the property, and where other potential short term and long-term solutions such as adaptations, have been considered but deemed unfeasible.

3.18

This brings the criteria in line with the existing disregards to the homeownership qualification criteria. This change recognises the urgent housing need of this group and the need to move them quickly to free up space in hospitals / residential care.

3.19

Qualification – Domestic abuse victims.

The proposals include a recommendation for tenancy related debt to be added to the disregards to the qualification criteria for victims of domestic abuse. This change is in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and recognises the need to remove barriers to rehousing for these applicants due to the urgency of their housing need.

3.20

Band A – Care Leavers.

- The Band A criteria for Care Leavers has been updated to reflect the original intention in the existing policy to award Band A including a backdate to the 16th birthday for those leaving the care of the local authority for the first time, at the point they are ready for independence.
- 3.21 The existing policy does not make this clear and the proposed amendments provide further clarity and explicitly stipulates that if a Care Leaver up to age 25 needs to be rehoused again following their initial move to independence, then they can be awarded Band A, but only if there is a recognised housing need, and the applicant is actively engaging with the Local Authority Care Leaver Teams, and that team is supportive of a move.
- 3.22 The proposed change also makes clear that if Band A is awarded in these circumstances, a 16th birthday backdate will not be applied. This change brings the policy in line with the original intention, whilst still recognising the local authorities corporate parenting responsibility for care leavers up to age 25.
- 3.23 **Significant changes.**
There are two significant policy changes proposed, which will impact a considerable proportion of the housing register.
- 3.24 **Increase to Band A for some supported / hostel move on cases.**
Since the introduction of the new PPP policy the number of applicants in Band B for move on from short term supported / hostel provision who have received offers of accommodation through PPP has reduced. This causes an issue for homelessness services as they are unable to refer new clients who need this provision resulting in less appropriate accommodation options having to be used. This issue is also hindering those who are ready for independence from moving on with their lives. A particular issue is the restrictions that residence in supported accommodation places on moving into employment due to the reduction in benefits and prohibitive costs of funding the accommodation independently.
- Under the existing policy those who are ready to move on from short term supported / hostel accommodation are awarded Band B Reasonable Preference. For those, whose accommodation is local authority contracted this priority is backdated to the date the applicant moved into the short term supported / hostel accommodation.
 - The proposed change would see a proportion of these applicants who are currently included in the Band B provision for move on, having their priority increased to Band A Additional Preference. This change would only apply to those applicants who are ready to move on from local authority contracted / grant funded short term supported / hostel accommodation which is local authority homeless provision. All other move on cases would remain in Band B in line with the current arrangements.
- 3.25 Most applicants moving to Band A under this proposal would no longer benefit from

- a backdate to their band date, as they do currently in Band B. This would mean that the Band A would only be awarded from the date the applicant is ready to move to independence. The exception to this rule would be for Section 17 child in need cases meeting this new Band A criteria, who once qualify for the scheme will have their Band A backdated to the date they moved into the accommodation.
- 3.26 Due to the increase in the level of priority from Band B to Band A it is considered that a backdate is no longer equitable for most of these cases, which takes into consideration other applicants in Band A and their relative priority. The exception to this will be for Section 17 Child in need cases who will be awarded a backdate to their Band A award to the date they moved into the accommodation. This is to allow for situations where a young person may not qualify for Property Pool Plus on moving into this type of accommodation as they are under 18 and may not have a trustee in place.
- 3.27 This change together with the change to the qualification criteria for this group to allow individual local authority protocol to prevail, will allow the local authority Housing Services and Children's Services to work closely together to plan the most appropriate pathway for young people accessing these services. As Care Leavers in Band A are awarded a Band backdate to their 16th birthday, they will still receive a higher priority than section 17 young people in local authority homeless / hostel provision who are awarded Band A.
- 3.28 The proposed changes will assist the local authority homelessness teams to better manage the demand on homelessness services and the associated temporary accommodation costs.
- 3.29 **Amendments to the Discretion criteria.**
The discretion criteria set out in the current policy is limited in scope and only covers certain groups of people including:
- Providing protection to people who need to move away from another local authority area, to escape violence, harm, or intimidation.
 - In circumstances where an applicant needs to move due to a serious offence (equal to MAPPA level 2 or 3), as defined by the Serious Crime Act 2007, Part 1, Schedule 1, there will be joint working with the Police, Probation Services, Adult Care Services, health professionals, registered providers, and other bodies, to manage any risk to the community.
 - In circumstances where a member of the Armed Forces community has been disadvantaged in respect of their ability to access suitable housing through their own or their family member's service in the Regular Armed Forces or Reserve Forces.
- 3.30 Since the current policy was implemented in January 2024 local authorities have already identified cases that have an exceptional urgent welfare need and require

intervention to assist with rehousing more quickly than can be facilitated via the policy. This has resulted in the recommendation to add an additional point to those listed above to allow for intervention in these exceptional welfare cases via a direct offer of accommodation.

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In addition to this the discretion section has been amended to make clear that where discretion is applied this should only be in situations that are exceptional in nature and where the consequences of not applying discretion have been considered.

- To ensure that discretion is applied consistently across the sub-region the reference to a discretion register has been included in the updated wording and this will be introduced once the policy is approved.
- A further change to the discretion section will allow local authorities to implement a period where a proportion of lettings will be offered via direct lettings to key groups.
- Allowing local authorities to implement a period of direct lettings will enable them to respond to crisis situations such as the recent extreme demand on homelessness services and associated temporary accommodation costs. Another example would be the housing crisis experienced during covid.
- A further point has been added to the discretion section to allow local authorities to implement small scale variations to the scheme to pilot new ways of working. This will help to inform future policy changes to improve services and resolve housing need for those most in need.
- Where any variation to the scheme is implemented, either for small scale trials or a period of direct lettings, information will be published on the PPP website to provide detail for openness, transparency, and accountability. Any variation will also take account of the local authority Housing Strategy and Tenancy Strategy.

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City Region local authorities to consider any views or concerns coming forward from the Sub-regional Officers group and make any final amendments to the proposed

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policy changes accordingly

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As some of the proposed changes are considered significant, on the basis that they will impact a considerable proportion of those registered with the scheme there will be a need to undertake a 12-week public consultation.

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It is Contract Boards intention to move ahead with a consultation process as soon as possible. The exact timescales for this are dependent on how soon each local authority can move through their required briefing processes. Based on information available at this time, the earliest point the consultation process can start is October 2024.

- 3.36 Following consultation there will be a requirement for the changes to be formally approved by each of the local authority's own democratic approval processes. Potential timescales for this are still being identified.
- 3.37 Once approved most of the changes can be implemented very quickly, however there will be a need for an update to the IT system to implement the increased priority for those ready to move on from local authority contracted / grant funded homeless provision, hostel / supported accommodation. It may be that this change can be incorporated within the next IT upgrade which is pencilled in for January / February 2025, however there will be a cost for this which has yet to be defined.
- Advantages / Disadvantages.**
- 3.38 The policy amendments will improve priority banding for a number of vulnerable clients as detailed above. The advantages include young people, care leavers, clients ready to move on from hostels, who will move up to Priority Band A.
- 3.39 The impact for these clients groups will ensure that young people have timely move on plans. Applications will be backdated to their 16th birthday, thus moving them up on the housing waiting list and reducing waiting times.
- 3.40 Clients in hostels who are ready for move on will then be awarded Band A, this will support the homelessness team to create vacancies within the commissioned supported housing schemes and reduce the associated B&B costs.
- 4.0 The impact of amending the banding priorities will increase the number of client in Band A. Although the process will benefit a number of clients, it will also reduce the number of social housing available to those clients within the lower priority bandings.
- 4.1 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
- 4.2 The social housing allocations scheme is a core service and the outlined amendments to the Allocations Policy and Procedures for Property Pool Plus will reflect the latest legislation changes.
- 5.0 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."
- 5.1 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**
- 6.0 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.

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

Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

6.2 Facilitate a choice-based lettings process to promote access to suitable social housing, to promote stability, thus improving health and wellbeing, resulting in greater independence.

Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

6.3 Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity.

Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Protect the most vulnerable households, as many rely on accessing suitable social housing to meet their housing needs.

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

Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

6.5 The proposed policy changed will tackle inequality and identifies that those most in need will be awarded high priority banding to secure social housing.

Working Towards a Greener Future

6.6 None at this stage

Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

7.0 The policy reflects the process to allow clients to secure social housing, therefore promote community stability within the Borough.

7.1 **RISK ANALYSIS**

8.0 None at this stage

8.1 **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ISSUES**

9.0 The equality implications have been identified and mitigated.

9.1 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

10.0 None at this stage

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact 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

