



Revised Housing Allocation Scheme

Lee Georgiou – 4th February 2021

Delivering a Gravesham to be proud of

Allocations scheme

Background:

- Every Local Authority is required to publish a Housing Allocation Scheme.
- Current scheme was introduced in 2014 following legislative change – Localism Act 2011 and Welfare Reform Act 2012.
- Legislative and market changes.
 - Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
 - Case law relating to Social Housing Allocations.
 - Reduced mobility as a result of the Housing Crisis.
 - Increase cost of housing.
 - Homeless household being placed outside LA's district.
 - UK left the EU on 1 January 2021.
 - New statutory guidance published in December 2020.

Background

In February 2020, Housing Services Committee were presented with some proposed amendments that would need to be formally consulted on. This included:

- Extended local connection period from 2 to 3 years.
- Refusal sanction – 12 months suspension for people refusing offers.
- An increased priority for homelessness applicants – not all.
- Increased priority for armed forces personnel injured in service or for their families if they die in service.
- Removing people with no housing need.
- Increased priority for all households under-occupying - Band A.
- The introduction of a Housing Allocations Panel.

Consultation

In total 20 weeks consultation, with limited number of responses.

- General agreement with the overarching principles.
- Concerns:
 - Suspending people for 12 months if they refuse a property where an auto bid is made
 - Suspending people if they refuse an suitable offer.
- Easily mitigated by the system – people can choose to auto-bid on specific types of properties, within specified locations.
- The policy set outs clearly what will be considered when deciding suitability, this includes: the property size, any medical/welfare needs, any risk of domestic abuse or other forms of violence within a specific location.

Current position

- Draft scheme was presented to Housing Services Cabinet Meeting on 16 November 2020 for further feedback and comment. Since then:
 - Reviewed by senior managers and officers within the Council.
 - Reviewed by the Legal Team.
 - A Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) drafted.
- Further amendments to note include:
 - Updated eligibility section to include the Withdrawal Agreement after the UK left the EU.
 - Change in terminology when applicants refuse an offer of accommodation, from suspend to remove. The effect will be the same and applicants can reapply after 12 months.
 - Added an exception to the Local Connection rules for travellers as a result of the transient lifestyle.
 - Extended membership of Housing Allocation Panel to include Senior Officer from outside the Housing Department to ensure objectivity.

Recommendation and next steps

- Recommend that Members support the revised Housing Allocation Scheme to be signed off by the Lead Member.
- Communication will be sent out to all stakeholders and partners, including a short briefing note for Members.
- Service will work with Kent Homechoice to update the system to reflect the impact on applicants' bands.
- New scheme will come in on 5th April 2021.

• Questions?