

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

2 NOVEMBER 2021

Report Title	REVISED HOMESSEEKERPLUS ALLOCATIONS POLICY			
Purpose of Report	To seek the Committee's approval for the adoption of the revised HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy following a consultation exercise			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Agree the changes made to the HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy and approve the revised policy for adoption. b) Give delegated authority to the Head of Strategic Housing in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Housing Committee to make minor textual and formatting changes before publication.			
Consultation and Feedback	There has been formal consultation between 1 st February and 29 th March 2021. Consultees included housing applicants, District Councillors, all Parish and Town Councils, key internal and external stakeholders.			
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Options	Committee could choose not to adopt the revised policy. However, this would mean that the previous policy, which is now outdated, would remain in place.			
Background Papers	Not applicable			
Appendices	Appendix A – Summary of changes to the HomeseekerPlus Policy Appendix B – Revised HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	Yes	No	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 HomeseekerPlus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the HomeseekerPlus Partnership, which consists of the six local authorities within Gloucestershire together with West Oxfordshire District Council, who work in partnership with social housing landlords to provide affordable homes for people to rent.
- 1.2 The seven local authorities within the HomeseekerPlus Partnership are Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester

City Council, Stroud District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

- 1.3 The purpose of the HomeseekerPlus Policy is to explain who is eligible to apply for affordable housing and how their housing needs will be assessed. This assessment must be in line with relevant legislation and the statutory code of guidance on the allocation of accommodation, as these set out how applications will be assessed in a fair and transparent way based on housing need.
- 1.4 Other than a major change to the HomeseekerPlus policy in 2016 to include West Oxfordshire District Council into the partnership and a name change to “HomeseekerPlus” there have previously only been minor alterations to the policy.
- 1.5 Following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (when minor changes were made in line with the new legislation) it was considered timely to conduct a full review of the current HomeseekerPlus Policy.
- 1.6 It had also become apparent that the HomeseekerPlus policy was open to interpretation and could be implemented differently across the partnership. It was felt necessary to provide greater clarification within the policy to ensure consistency throughout the partnership.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The revised HomeseekerPlus Policy has been developed in collaboration with key stakeholders including Stroud District Council officers and the other local authorities and housing providers who make up the membership of the HomeseekerPlus Operational Group and the HomeseekerPlus Management Board.
- 2.2 The proposed changes are detailed in Appendix A.
- 2.3 Public consultation on the proposed changes ran from 1st February until 29th March 2021 with Forest of Dean District Council coordinating the consultation on behalf of the partnership. The consultation was publicised to all 19,000 applicants who are registered on HomeseekerPlus, as well as housing providers and councils. It was also publicised via social media platforms and on the HomeseekerPlus website.
- 2.4 At a District level an information Sheet on the review of the HomeseekerPlus Policy was disseminated to all Stroud District Council Members on 8th February 2021. A link to the consultation was sent to all Members, Town and Parish Councils, internal and external stakeholders on 8th February 2021. The consultation was also publicised on the Stroud District Council website.
- 2.5 In total there were 232 responses to the consultation. Overall responses were positive to the suggested changes with respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.
- 2.6 Following the consultation exercise two additional minor changes were made to the policy as follows:

The word 'urgent' at Point 22.15 has been added in for the distinction between those with minor non housing related physical barriers to those with urgent housing related physical barriers.

Point 22.15 – *'For example, a member of the household seeking accommodation is disabled and re-housing will enable that person to overcome **urgent** physical barriers created by current accommodation and it has been established that the home cannot be adapted to meet needs e.g. steps and stairs.'*

The paragraph below has been removed as this is no longer relevant due to the mechanisms of the current I.T. system.

"If there is an occasion where two or more applicants have the same band start date and application date, the Social Housing Landlord will make a decision which applicant best meets the aims and objectives of HomeseekerPlus."

- 2.7 There are a number of other minor changes to the policy which are to address spelling, punctuation and grammar or are in relation to presentation. These changes have not changed the overall document, meanings, or how applicants are assessed or allocated housing.
- 2.8 The revised policy wording with the proposed changes can be found in Appendix B. Some formatting updates are still required.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Changes made to the HomeseekerPlus policy have been made in order to update the policy in response to national legislative and policy changes, and to refine wording where this has been found to be necessary; there have been no changes which radically alter the way in which households access affordable homes within the district. As a result, officers support these changes in operational and strategic terms.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

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4.2 Legal Implications

As a Local Housing Authority the Authority has a statutory duty in respect of the allocation of housing to applicants. These duties are contained in Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

In addition to these duties the Authority has a duty to ensure that it operates in accordance with its duties under the Equalities Act 2010. When considering changes to the policy the Authority must undertake a fair, reasonable and transparent consultation and consider any

responses to that consultation before determining whether or not to make changes to the policy.

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4.3 **Equality Implications**

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

4.4 **Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.