

# Portfolio Holder decision record sheet

**Name of decision maker:** Cllr Margaret Griffiths

**Portfolio:** Housing

**Date of Portfolio Holder decision:** March 2016

**Title of decision:** Minor amendment to Housing Allocations Policy

**Part II:**

**Part II reason:**

**Decision made and reasons:**

To amend the Housing Allocations Policy to relieve current pressure on the Council's one and two bedroom properties. The Council is experiencing particularly extreme demand for two bedroom properties, while demand for three and four bedroom properties is relatively unpressured. Three bedroom properties are going to households with less 'housing need' (i.e. less housing register points), while two bedroom properties are only going to people with very high need. Amending the bedroom standard will give flexibility to more families to bid for larger properties. The policy is kept under continual renewal and the impact of this change will be measured as well as any changes in external demand.

**Reports considered: ( here reference can be made to specific documents)**

Current Housing Allocations Policy

Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2012

**Officers/Councillors/Ward Councillors/Stakeholders consulted:**

Elliott Brooks – Assistant Director, Housing

Natasha Brathwaite – Group Manager, Strategic Housing

Andy Vincent – Group Manager, Tenants and Leaseholders

Housing Team Leader Group

**Monitoring Officer comments:**

No comments to add to the report.

**Deputy S151 Officer comments:**

The impact of the proposed minor amendment will need to be regularly reviewed to measure the potential impact of additional arrears and to determine their impact on the in-year budget and on the business plan.

**Implications:**

**Meeting housing need**

Based on reviews of allocations and the point totals of successful bidders to properties through Moving with Dacorum, the current Housing Allocations Policy has been assessed as not best meeting local housing need. The bedroom standard in the current policy has had the unintentional consequence of inflating demand for two bedroom properties at a time when the Council is welcoming demand from households trying to downsize. Two bedroom properties are going to only those with very urgent high need, leaving households with other high needs in poor situations for long periods. At the same time demand for three bedroom properties is much less and properties are being let to people with lower need. This policy change will go some way to redressing this imbalance and ensure the Council continues to meet its commitment to reduce housing need.

**Financial risk**

This change will allow some households to move to a property where they will be impacted by the

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housing benefit 'spare room subsidy' rule. This could mean that households make a decision to move that negatively impacts on their ability to pay their rent. The service will aim to pro-actively offer advice and support to these families, however in some cases this may result in arrears.

### **Value for money**

Where high need households remain in unsatisfactory housing conditions for long periods due to the limited availability of two bedroom properties then situations may become crises that result in homelessness. Homelessness is very expensive for the Council to manage requiring the management of investigations and temporary accommodation. Making sure that high need households can access the limited amount of Council stock there is will help the Council achieve better value for money.

### **Options considered and reasons for rejection:**

The option of not changing the policy is not considered an option as the current policy results in stock going to people with lower need than households who could otherwise be accessing the same properties if the policy were altered.

### **Portfolio Holder's signature:**

**Date:**

**Details of any interests declared and any dispensations given by the Standards Committee:**

### **For Member Support Officer use only**

Date decision record sheet received from portfolio holder:

Date decision published:

Decision no:

Date of expiry of call-in period:

Date any call-in received or decision implemented:

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## 1.0 Background

### The Housing Allocations Policy and the Bedroom Standard

At the time of the Housing Allocations Policy review in 2012/13, the Government had released its new 'bedroom standard'. This standard treats all bedrooms (beyond the primary bedroom) as a 'bedroom' and does not distinguish between 'single' and 'double'. This standard was adopted by the Council's Housing Allocations Policy in 2013.

For the purposes of the Housing Allocations Policy bedrooms are currently allocated as follows:

- One bedroom for the primary applicant and their partner
- One additional bedroom for:
  - Every pair of siblings under 10
  - Every pair of same-sex siblings 0 – 20
  - Every household member 21 and over

Current demand for Council properties is concentrated on two bedroom properties. The above standard means that quite large families can find that they are only able to bid for two bedroom properties (e.g. a couple and two same-sex children aged 18 and 20).

The Council has made a commitment to reduce local housing need, which is now being unintentionally impacted by this standard. This standard has inflated demand for two bedroom properties at a time when the Council is also welcoming demand from households trying to downsize. As a result of the numbers of households seeking two bedroom properties, they are going to only those households with very urgent high need. This leaves households with other high needs in poor situations for long periods. At the same time demand for three bedroom properties is much less and properties are being let to people with lower need.

The amendment being proposed introduces a second standard that will also be recognised and which will allocate bedrooms as follows:

- One bedroom for the primary applicant and their partner
- One additional bedroom for:
  - Every pair of siblings under 5
  - Every pair of same-sex siblings 0 – 15
  - Every household member 16 and over

Households who fall between the two standards will be able to bid for properties in two size categories to provide maximum choice (e.g. a family with a girl aged 4 and a boy aged 6 can bid on both two and three bedroom properties).

To review the success of this policy amendment, allocations and points will continue to be monitored by the Strategic Housing service.

## 2.0 Proposed policy amendment

The proposed change is highlighted on page 20, 21 and 24 of Appendix 1.