

SUBJECT: IMPACT OF REVISED ALLOCATION SCHEME

Report to: Scrutiny Committee 22 October 2015

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 A revised allocation scheme was adopted by GYBC earlier this year. The scheme came into effect from 4th August 2014 to allow for processes to be in place.

1.2 The key amendments to the scheme included;

- a) Applicants will not qualify for an application if they have demonstrated unacceptable behaviour. This will include
 - i. Owing significant housing related debt to a Council, Registered Landlord or Private Landlord. (*Significant housing debt is rent arrears/use and occupation charges, including housing benefit and court costs, equivalent to 8 weeks and above chargeable rent/monies for the property, rechargeable repairs and repayable rent deposits*)
 - ii. Conviction for illegal or immoral use of your home
 - iii. Proven social housing fraud
 - iv. Proven nuisance and annoyance to neighbours or visitors sufficient to have warranted action by the police, Council or landlord
 - v. Subject to an Anti Social Behaviour Order, an Anti-Social Behaviour Contract, Demotion of tenancy or any similar penalty introduced under future anti-social behaviour legislation
 - vi. Allowing the condition of the property to deteriorate beyond reasonable wear and tear
 - vii. Being a perpetrator of domestic abuse as this is a ground for possession
 - viii. A decision has been made by a LA that the applicant is intentionally homeless
 - ix. The applicant has placed themselves in housing need or a greater housing need through an act or failure to act e.g. moving to a smaller property to create an overcrowded situation.

- b) A person will not qualify for an allocation where they are able to meet their own need, after considering their individual circumstances.

- c) The allocation scheme included a safe surrender scheme to permit applicants to terminate their tenancy to avoid arrears accruing without suffering a penalty should they reapply at a later date.

- d) The introduction of a 2 year residence criteria unless accepted as statutory homeless or moving to the Borough to receive specialist support.
- e) The allocation scheme should allow for the creation of local lettings plans e.g. to ensure that properties in low demand are able to be let within a reasonable timeline or other specific circumstances.
- f) Applicants under the age of 18 will only be admitted to the scheme in exceptional circumstances and will only be offered an allocation if a suitable trustee has been appointed.
- g) The existing method of awarding priority will continue in the revised scheme.
- h) Reduced priority for cases where the applicants behaviour is such that they should not be offered a property but have not reached the threshold for non qualification
- i) Additional preference will be awarded to applicants who are in work at least 24 hours per week by backdating their date of application by 12 months. Additional preference is only awarded if an initial housing need is established; working itself does not constitute a housing need.
- j) Applicants will be permitted to make a preference of the geographical area and type of property that they wish to be considered for, for a period of three months. If the applicant has not been allocated a property within the three month period, housing options will reserve the right to consider properties outside the applicants preferences.
- k) Applicants are allowed two offers of suitable accommodation. Refusal of two suitable offers will result in the applicant being removed from the allocation pool. Applicants will be able to re-apply after a period of 12 months. Statutory homeless applicants are allowed one suitable offer.

2.0 Impact of the revised scheme

2.1 The Scheme has been in place for just over a year. In general applicants receive more information than before, all decisions are given in writing with review rights explained. The aim was to provide a clear framework that applicants could understand, including the consequences of refusing suitable offers. There are around 300 cases in the pool at any one time awaiting an allocation.

2.2 In the past year, there have been 232 applications who failed the eligibility or qualification criteria. Of these, 114 were due to no housing need (which would have applied under the previous scheme). In addition, 47 applicants failed the two year residence criteria and 42 failed due to previous behaviour. 25 applicants were assessed as able to meet their own need and 14 were

removed from the allocation pool after refusing two suitable offers. (Please see Appendix 1).

2.3 The revised scheme permitted additional preference in cases where the applicant is working for 24 hours per week or more. Since March 2015, 23 offers were made to applicants who benefitted from the backdating of their registration due to 'worker' status. As with all nominations, there may be some refusals and therefore this may not reflect the total allocations for people in work.

2.4 No requests have been made under the safe surrender scheme.

2.5 Three local letting plans for low demand properties has been adopted.

2.6 One is for low demand properties which permits a reserve list to be created of applicants who would not normally be eligible for the main allocation pool. Those applicants not eligible due to behaviour remain excluded. The residence criterion has been initially relaxed to 6 months which will be monitored. Applicants in the reserve pool will only be eligible for low demand properties i.e. properties where no there is no suitable applicant in the main allocation pool.

2.7 Low demand properties remain a small but significant issue for allocation. These are found primarily in the Middlegate area and are 3 bed flats or maisonettes. In addition, sheltered flats above ground floor are also in low demand. The local letting plan and other measures has produced some improvement, however these properties have a disproportionate effect on average void times for GYCH properties.

2.8 The remaining two plans were to allocate specific schemes. The first scheme was at Hemsby, on behalf of Orwell Housing Association, which gave priority to the residents of Hemsby. The second was for the allocation of the properties at Trafalgar House & The Old Fire Station on behalf of Saffron Housing Association. This was to allocate to a mixed community rather than solely applicants in high need.

2.9 There have been 66 decisions made on reviews submitted by applicants who have disagreed with the decision made on their application. In comparison, there were no requests to review decisions on allocation made under the previous scheme for the first 5 months of 2014/15.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee note this report

Appendix 1

HOUSING REGISTER - statistics as at 15th October 2015	
Number of active applications (assessed and scored – by bedroom size)	95 X 1 bed 91 X 2 bed 48 X 3 bed 32 X 4 bed 8 X 5 bed 1 X 6 bed
Of those above – applications needing ground floor	91
Of those above application need sheltered housing	34
No of GYCH and Housing Associations properties let 1.10.14 – 30.9.15	589
Applications from ‘workers’ who have been offered a property since March 2015 - because their registration date was back dated by 12 months	23
Applications cancelled due to refusal of two suitable offers	14
Number of Reviews completed since August 2014	66
Percentage of applicants by nationality	
British	94%
Europeans inc Portuguese, Polish, Greek, Italian, Latvian Lithuanian, Czech	5.5%
Non Europeans inc Thai, Brazilian, Gambian, Chinese	0.5%
Number of applications who failed eligibility or qualification criteria for the period 15th October 2014 to 15th October 2015	
No Housing Need	114
Failed Residency Criteria	47
Not Eligible due to Immigration Status	4
Housing Related Debt (equivalent to 8 weeks rent or more)	19
Worsened circumstances	15
Able to meet own housing need	25
Intentionally homeless	4
Perpetrator of domestic violence	1
Police Warrant for ASB	1
Poor condition of property	1
Under 18	1