

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY- MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

REPORT OF DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE (COMMUNITY DIRECTION)



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL WARDS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To brief Members on how medical circumstances are taken into consideration when assessing a household for inclusion on the housing register.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Scrutiny Commission notes the contents of the report and acknowledges the Councils current method of taking into account medical circumstances

3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

- 3.1 The allocation of housing is made in accordance with Part VI Housing Act 1996. Priority for housing should go to those in greatest housing need and there is statutory guidance on who these people should be. There are 5 reasonable preference categories of housing need that need to be incorporated into all housing allocations policies. Section 167(2) (d) is `people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to disability`.
- 3.2 This means that all allocations policies must be framed to give reasonable preference to applicants who fall into one of the reasonable preference groups, over those who do not. However, equal weighting does not need to be applied to each group, this can be determined by each housing authority according to local pressures.
- 3.3 The current Hinckley & Bosworth housing allocations scheme began in March 2011, when the council joined with the 6 other district councils in Leicestershire to develop a new Leicestershire Choice based lettings scheme. The 6 Councils and the majority of the housing associations, joined together to use one application form and one computer system in order to simplify applying for social housing in the county. All the Councils allocations policies have adopted a common banding scheme to ensure all applications are assessed the same across the 7 districts.
- 3.4 When a person applies to the housing register their current housing circumstances are assessed against the 4 housing needs bands of the housing register. The 3 highest bands incorporate the people who fall into one of the reasonable preference groups, (and also Council tenants who are under-occupying), with the people not in a reasonable preference group falling into the Low band. When someone applies on the register and they want their medical circumstances to be taken into consideration for housing, then a medical assessment form and/or supporting letters from their GP, specialist or other professional support worker are provided to verify the condition.

4 Housing Register banding

- 4.1 The housing allocations policy uses a 4 band system to determine the degree of housing need - Low, Medium, High and Priority.
- 4.2 Medical conditions fall into either the Medium band or the Priority band. The current allocations policy is simpler to use and understand than the previous policy. The

bandings now encompass a much broader variation in the severity of the medical condition all within the same banding.

- 4.3 In the medium band the person has to have a medical, disability or mobility problem. This could include:
- Verified high medical need where a move will improve or prevent the deterioration of a condition. This will apply when a home seeker condition is currently directly affected by their accommodation and a move is needed to have a positive effect on their condition or whereas as a result of their condition their current accommodation is not suitable to their needs.
 - Level access accommodation is required and there is no prospects of adaptations to the home seekers current property within 12 months. Suitable proof will be required ie confirmation from local occupational therapists and landlord. The home seeker may be referred to local agencies for assistance with adaptations.
- 4.4 In the Priority band a person needs to have an Emergency medical need which could include
- a progressive or chronic medical condition combined with other difficulties such as the need for adapted accommodation
 - the inability to be discharged from hospital to their current accommodation

5 Assessment

- 5.1 When assessing the persons housing circumstances and considering whether a medical condition is to be taken into account in this assessment, the applicants' current housing is considered and whether their medical issue can be eased by a move.
- 5.2 If the applicant has a medical condition but they are appropriately housed or it cannot be improved by a move, then the medical condition will not be taken into account in the assessment. An example would be if a person suffers from arthritis and rheumatism and currently lives in a ground floor property. They have a medical condition but we can not offer them anything better than what they currently live in to suit their medical needs.
- 5.3 When an application is received, it is assessed by the housing support officers in the housing allocations section. They consider the applicants whole circumstances, not individual issues in isolation. Factors considered are household size, property size, tenure type, medical issues, income, arrears, welfare issues, social factors then band the application accordingly. All Housing Support Officers have received training in the assessment of medical needs in relation to housing.

6 Future housing suitability

- 6.1 An applicant's medical condition can often determine the type of property that they will be eligible to bid for. For example, if the person has mobility problems or has medical issues where they would benefit from the support of our emergency alarm service, then this can be identified on the application form and their eligibility adjusted to allow them to bid for these types of properties.
- 6.2 For a few applicants, they may require a move to another property as their current home cannot have an alterations or adaptations made to it, in order to manage their condition. In the majority of these cases, an Occupational therapist will be involved with the family and will have provided a detailed assessment of the persons future housing requirements. In these cases, a property will be sought which is partially

adapted and where the family can manage in the short term until social services are able to complete all the works required.

7 How medical assessments are carried out.

- 7.1 The majority of people who have a medical condition will fall within the medium band. Assessments are undertaken by a small number of officers to ensure a consistent approach to assessing all applications on the Housing Register. If the officer is unsure which band to use, then the Housing Support Officer refers the case to the Allocations & Tenancy Manager to discuss the case and determine the appropriate band.
- 7.2 If a Priority band has been awarded for a medical condition, then the council would usually have been alerted to the situation by other professionals. Such circumstances could be that the person is found to be living in substandard accommodation with a significant health problem or disability, they have had an accident so their property is no longer suitable, or their chronic medical condition has deteriorated to such a degree that social services are not able to modify their current home with further adaptations.
- 7.3 As of 30 October, there are 2245 applicants on the housing register. In September, 65 applications were accepted onto the housing register. 9 of those applications submitted a medical form and were placed in the following bands;
LOW 3 (no housing need on medical grounds as already adequately housed)
MEDIUM 4 (there were no medical needs)
HIGH 2 (tenants under-occupying)
No applicant was awarded a band, purely on Medical grounds.
- 7.4 On only two occasions has the housing register banding been appealed due to medical circumstances. In these cases the applications were referred to our independent medical advisors, Now Medical, for their medical opinion on the case. It is the Council which makes the final decision on banding, but it will take into consideration all supporting evidence from medical advisors and other agencies that have knowledge of the individuals' particular circumstances.
- 7.5 The housing allocation/ options teams in the other 6 Leicestershire Councils, work in a very similar to this process, with the officers in these teams undertaking the assessments of the housing applications against the policy.

8 Alternative methods of assessment

- 8.1 There are a number of alternative ways of assessing medical needs in relation to housing. It should be noted that the assessment isn't purely an assessment of the particular medical condition, but how current housing circumstances impact on the medical condition.

8.2 Home visits

Home visits for each applicant wishing to have medical conditions considered could be undertaken. This would involve additional time, staffing and budgetary resources. In quite a number of cases the applicant will already have another factor that places them in Medium band, so undertaking a visit to confirm a `moderate` medical condition will not result in a change to their banding.

8.3 Medical Panel

This panel could include housing officers and other professionals to discuss a persons medical condition in relation to their housing circumstances. This would involve the time and expense of other professionals, such as an Occupational

Therapist or a doctor, meeting regularly to assess the applications. This would incur a monetary and time cost and will produce delays in assessing applications. At present, these professionals provide their opinion free of charge on the individual cases where they think it appropriate to do so.

8.3 Independent medical assessor

All medical assessments could be forwarded to an independent medical advisor to consider against the policy and make recommendations as to future housing requirements. This was done with under the previous housing allocations policy, where more detailed assessment of a persons medical condition was necessary to in order to award one of 5 grade of points, specifically given just for a medical circumstance.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (KP)

9.1 The Council will incur costs of medical assessments. The current provider of this service (Now Medical) charges £12 for a basic assessment or £25 for a full assessment report.

9.2 A budget of £500 is available for this service within the Choice Based Lettings cost centre for 2013/2014. On the basis of the above costings, this would fund 20 full assessments per annum. Any requirement to increase this budget due to increased assessments would need to be formally requested in line with the Council's financial procedure rules.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (AB)

10.1 Contained in the body of the report

11 CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS

11.1 This report supports the following Corporate Plan aims:

- Supporting individuals

12 CONSULTATION

12.1 Consultation on the current Allocations Policy was undertaken with a number of stakeholders including existing applicants, RSL'd, the third sector and social services.

13 RISK IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None

14 KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY – EQUALITY AND RURAL IMPLICATIONS

The Housing Allocation application form allows for individuals circumstances impacting on their housing to be assessed and prioritised if appropriate.

15 CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community Safety implications
- Environmental implications

- ICT implications
- Asset Management implications
- Human Resources implications
- Planning Implications
- Voluntary Sector

Background papers: None

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