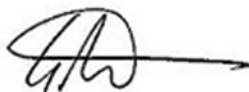


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: all
REPORT TITLE Housing Allocation Scheme Review	
REPORT OF Director of Housing	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Housing Scrutiny Committee	DATE 13 th January 2025
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>Camden is in the process of reviewing its Housing Allocation Scheme (the Scheme) with a view to making both minor and major changes to it. The report summarises minor changes to the Scheme which have now been agreed by the Executive Director for Supporting Communities following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Better Homes, and draft opportunity areas for major changes to the Scheme. Any proposed major changes to the Scheme will be subject to public consultation. The report also sets out proposed timescales for the work on major changes.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report</p> <p>Contact Officer:</p> <p><i>Gerry Crowley</i> <i>Gerry.crowley@camden.gov.uk</i></p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>That the Committee note and comment on the report.</p>	

Signed:



Date: 23 December 2024

1. Purpose of Report (and Reason for Urgency)

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an opportunity for the Committee to note the areas of minor change to the Housing Allocation Scheme.
- 1.2 The purpose is also to provide an opportunity for the Committee to note and comment on the draft opportunity areas for major changes to the Scheme, in advance of further governance, legal input and public consultation on specific changes.

2. Background

- 2.1 Under the Housing Act 1988 (as amended) there is a legal requirement for every council to publish a Housing Allocation Scheme which will determine priorities for allocating social housing. The Scheme sets out the rules that decide who can apply for accommodation available through the council. It describes how the Council assesses applications for housing, prioritises each application, and decides which applicant will be offered a council or housing association home.
- 2.2 The Scheme was last reviewed in 2018. In recent years, significant work has been carried out to explore how Camden could better deliver housing allocations to residents, and how the Council could improve the scheme. Reviewing the Scheme regularly is essential to ensure it meets current needs and addresses any emerging issues or changes to legislation, e.g. increase in homelessness, Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- 2.3 Carrying out a review is also good housekeeping, and helps to find and address any inefficiencies or inequities in the system and improve fairness. The major changes consultation will also be an opportunity to incorporate feedback from residents.
- 2.4. There are approximately 22,800 local authority owned homes in Camden. Social housing allocations play a role in many Camden residents' lives: As of April 2024, there were approximately 7,800 households on the Council's housing register, which is operated under the Scheme. For the most part, Camden's housing allocations including homes owned by Housing Associations, are operated via choice-based lettings.
- 2.5 Officers will take a two-stage approach to reviewing the Scheme: making some minor changes first, followed by major changes which will be consulted on. Whilst it is accepted that a major review of the Scheme is required, officers have identified several policy areas where minor changes can be made more quickly to improve the Scheme in the meantime.

2.6 Opportunity areas for changes have been drawn from a range of work including:

- The Housing Allocations Stocktake
- Strategy Design and Insight Allocations Discovery
- Housing and Domestic Abuse transformation work
- Young People's Placement Sufficiency transformation work
- Disability Oversight Panel Allocations Workshop
- Changes to guidance on the eligibility of Higher Support Needs (Group E) points allocation for those with mental health needs
- Residents Panel Workshop on the Housing Allocation Scheme
- Temporary Accommodation pressures information
- Recommendations from staff
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government letter to Councils

3. Why is this work needed?

3.1 The landscape in housing has become more challenging in recent years. Increasing private sector rents, unaffordable mortgage rates, welfare reform, and the cost-of-living crisis mean there are fewer homes in Camden that are genuinely affordable to residents. As a result, demand for social housing is growing.

3.1 With limited funding available for housing development, our steady supply of new social homes can't meet this demand. Officers need to ensure that we allocate existing social homes to those who need them most.

3.2 Along with housing pressures, residents are also facing additional hardships that come with our struggling economy and the aftermath of the pandemic. More residents now come to us experiencing multiple disadvantages.

3.3 Since the Scheme was last updated, a lot has changed. Legislation and best practice have evolved and so have the way we work and our corporate priorities. Extensive work has also been carried out internally to identify opportunity areas where we could bring about positive change.

4 What will this work achieve?

4.1 Reviewing the Housing Allocation Scheme will help us make sure that the way we prioritise housing allocations is fair and balanced, makes good sense, and puts the needs of residents at its heart. Carrying out the statutory consultation required for major changes to the scheme would ensure residents' views and priorities are heard in policy change.

4.2 Keeping the Scheme up to date will also ensure we remain compliant, preparing us for regulatory inspections.

5 What could this mean for residents?

5.1 There are a number of potential benefits that we hope an updated Scheme could have for residents:

- Residents could find the updated scheme simpler, easier to understand and more accessible. The language we use could be clearer, and the points system more straightforward. This would make it easier to see who qualifies for what and why.
- Residents could have their needs considered more holistically. The way different points awards add up could make more sense.
- Residents who have a housing need identified by Adult Social Care, including those young care experienced people, could have improved access to Direct Offers.
- Residents experiencing homelessness, and survivors of domestic abuse, could have access to a more tailored housing offer.

6 Minor changes

6.1 To ensure the Housing Allocation Scheme is operating fairly and within the law, the Executive Director of Supporting Communities following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Better Homes can approve any minor amendments to the Scheme providing that the amendment is not considered to be major and is not considered likely to affect more than five per cent of lettings.

6.2 Based on the discovery work we have carried out; minor changes have now been agreed in the following policy areas:

- **Sheltered Housing:** we have formalised practices that have been piloted successfully aimed at improved access to sheltered housing.
- **Underoccupancy:** ways to incentivise downsizing to free up more family-sized homes
- **Direct offers:** improving our use of direct offers to meet needs such as for foster carer and adoptive parents, bereaved families, and people drawing on Adult Social Care support
- **Health and Housing Points:** improving our assessment and review process
- **Domestic Abuse:** bringing the language of the scheme in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and differentiating between domestic abuse and other kinds of violence and harassment

Specific details of the changes can be seen at Appendix 1 – *Table of minor changes and additions to the scheme*

- 6.3 In December 2024, the Executive Director following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Better Homes agreed the above minor changes. Changes made will impact fewer than 5% of annual lets.

7 Major changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme

- 7.1 We will shortly be seeking approval to consult on undertaking a broader review of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme which will identify a number of opportunity areas to make major changes to deliver improvements to the Scheme.

It is hoped that any changes will deliver on resident feedback to make the policy more accessible and improve the customer journey when navigating through the process.

This will also be an opportunity to review how we prioritise our housing stock to ensure that those with the greatest need receive the help they need.

- 7.2 Once we have identified specific major changes to the Scheme, we will carry out a public consultation to seek views on proposals before updating the scheme.

8 Timeline

- 8.1 Below is an estimated timeline for the progression of this work. Progressing work on major changes involves significant governance including Cabinet lead-in processes, public consultation and counsel advice, which is why this will take some time. Please note that this timeline is subject to change, and assumes sign-off at each level of governance:

Activity	Target
Minor changes made to the scheme	End of December 2024
Major changes identified and permission obtained to carry out a public consultation	End of May 2025
Public consultation held on major changes to the scheme	End of July 2025
Seeking Cabinet sign-off on major changes	End of October 2025
Implement the updated scheme	21 Dec 2025

9 Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

- 9.1 As described in section 2 above, the demand for social housing in Camden far outstrips the supply so the Council will inevitably be able to meet only some of that demand. The allocations scheme is the mechanism for managing the trade-offs involved.

- 9.2 Two of the largest financial pressures on the Council at present are the costs of meeting its statutory duties to provide temporary accommodation to homeless families and to provide housing for care experienced young people. The allocations policy could be used to help relieve these financial pressures. However, given the limited supply of social housing prioritising different housing needs would inevitably mean that groups that are currently prioritised would receive less priority in future. The broader review of the allocations scheme described in section 7 will need to address these difficult trade-offs.

10 Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 10.1 The Housing Act 1996 provides that every local housing authority in England must have a Housing Allocation Scheme for determining priorities in allocating housing accommodation.
- 10.2 The present Scheme allows for minor amendments to be made to it by the Executive Director Supporting People following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member, providing that `the amendment is not considered to be major and is not considered likely to affect more than five per cent of lettings`.
- 10.3 Careful consideration was given to the question of whether the proposed minor changes to the existing Scheme outlined in this report constituted a “major change of policy” for the purposes of sections 166A(3) and/or 168(3) of the Housing Act 1996 such as to require formal consultation ahead of any implementation. It was concluded that none of the proposed changes, whether looked at individually or cumulatively, have that effect. In the main they represent nuanced changes to specific aspects of the Scheme to ensure compliance with relevant law and guidance; to improve the way in which the Council allocates properties and to ensure that it makes best use of available resources. The main policy objectives behind the existing Scheme remain unchanged.
- 10.3 As set out in paragraph 6.3 of this report, officers considered that the proposed changes, taken together, are unlikely to affect more than 5% of annual lets and therefore falls within the current delegation for the Executive Director to decide, following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.

11 Environmental Implications

None

12 Equalities Impact Assessment

- 12.1 We will carry out Equality Impact Assessments before recommending any changes to the scheme.

12.2 A Disability Oversight Panel workshop was held to look at how Camden can improve housing allocations with disabled residents. Key learnings from this session will be closely considered as this work progresses.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Summary of minor changes and additions to the scheme

REPORT ENDS