

Report to: Executive Board 11th November 2002

HOUSING ALLOCATION POINTS SCHEME - AMENDMENTS

<p>Report of: Business Manager Housing Management and Homelessness Business Unit</p> <p>Report Author: Graham Stratford, Housing Management Business Unit. Tel. No. (01865) 252751 Email: gstratford@oxford.gov.uk</p> <p>Lead Member Responsible: Housing Portfolio Member</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility: Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Key Decision: No</p>	<p>WARDS AFFECTED ALL</p>
<p>SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>A previous report to the Board and full Council outlined changes to the legislation governing Allocations and the keeping of a Housing Register.</p> <p>The report noted that in light of the implementation of these changes in January 2003, it would be necessary to adjust the Points Scheme to give additional preference to persons living or working in Oxford, in order to prioritise applicants with a genuine local connection for any available accommodation.</p> <p>The report asked for permission in principle for such an adjustment, and promised a further report on the actual level of adjustment required. This is that further report.</p> <p>The Board is asked to RECOMMEND to Council the adoption of an additional pointing category for local connection, that this category carry an award of 20 points, and that such an award be conditional on residence within the City boundaries as defined in the Allocations Policy Digest (to include persons resident in Oxford City Council properties in other Local Authority districts), or employment within those boundaries for a minimum of 16 hours per week.</p>	

Background

1. The Homelessness Act (2002) specifies that from 1st January 2003, Local Authorities must not bar any categories of person from registering as applicants on their General Housing Registers, although the legislation does grant powers to exclude specific individuals where good cause exists.
2. Registration on Oxford City Council's General Housing Register is currently limited to those persons who reside within the City boundaries as defined in our Allocations Policy Digest (this includes those persons resident in Oxford City Council owned properties in other Local Authority Districts), and persons who do not reside within the City but work within its boundaries for a minimum of 16 hours per week. This amounts to a blanket ban on persons without a local connection, and will be unlawful under the new legislation.
3. Given the very limited supply of social housing in Oxford, and the perceived desirability of the city as a place to live, officers consider that it is prudent to amend the points system to give additional priority to those persons with a local connection, as allowed for in Section 167(2) of the Homelessness Act (2002), without prejudicing the ability of persons resident elsewhere to register.

Technical

4. The current points scheme is used to prioritise housing applicants by reference to their housing need. The Council is legally bound to give reasonable preference to persons in greatest housing need, such as those persons who are homeless, those with welfare or medical needs, and those suffering from overcrowding in their current home. Applicants are pointed according to the information they provide relating to their current circumstances.
5. When a property becomes available for allocation, officers generate a shortlist of suitable applicants on the Housing Management Information System, by applying a set of restrictions appropriate to the type and location of the property. This process ensures that only households of appropriate size, and who are registered for the relevant property type and area, are considered for each property. The shortlist is in descending order, with the applicant having the highest points, and therefore the greatest housing need, in first position.
6. From the 1st of January 2003, housing applications from persons with no local connection will have to be entered on the General Register. These applications will have to be assessed on the current housing situation of the applicants, in just the same way as applications from local residents are assessed. This may well lead to instances in which applicants for housing who do not reside in the city will have more points than local

applicants who need the same type of property, and will therefore be housed ahead of local residents.

8. It would be possible to amend the points system in such a way that this situation could never occur, by giving a very high level of points for local connection. Officers do not believe that this course of action is advisable, as it would not be in the spirit of the legislation, and would leave the Allocations Policy open to legal challenge.
9. It is felt to be more appropriate to grant a lower level of additional pointing for local connection, proportional to the level of points currently awarded in the various categories used for assessing applications. This will ensure that in cases where applicants with similar levels of housing need are in competition for the same property, then applicants with a local connection will be given priority. Officers believe that this is the most that can be achieved within the spirit of the new legislation.
10. Officers therefore consider that an award of 20 points for local connection as previously defined would be the most effective and proportional response to the changes in legislation.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY: BUSINESS MANAGER, LEGAL SERVICES (BHUPINDER GILL); BUSINESS MANAGER HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND HOMELESSNESS (KAREN TURNER); HOUSING PORTFOLIO HOLDER (COUNCILLOR VAL SMITH).

Background Papers: Homelessness Act (2002).
Oxford City Council Allocations Policy Digest (1997).