

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COHESION POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2024

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Cleator (Chairman), Dawes, Khadka, Milham, Oliver, Parfitt, Rodwell, Russell and Wilby
Cabinet Members:	Councillors D Naghi (Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Safety) and Wales (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness)

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fort.

38. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Russell was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Fort.

39. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

40. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

41. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

42. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

43. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

44. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

45. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

In response to queries from the Chairman, the Head of Housing & Regulatory Services apologised that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action

Plan item had been delayed until the December meeting due to operational reasons.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference, be noted.

46. HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME - REVIEW

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and outlined the proposed changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme. Some of the proposed amendments included:

- To amend banding to encourage households to remain in current accommodation, avoid use of Temporary Accommodation (TA) where possible and offer more opportunity for housing to applicants who offer a community contribution. A fifth band would be added specifically for households in TA, which would not be eligible to bid on the housing register, but would be allocated suitable social housing directly;
- Due to the significant increase in Housing Register applications, it was proposed to amend qualifying criteria to favour applicants more likely to be successful in, so as not to build unrealistic expectations. Resident criteria would be changed from two to three years and family connection and returning resident criteria would be removed. Employment criteria would remain the same; and
- To allow larger households to bid on properties that do not meet their bedroom requirement to improve their current living situation. Additional wording will be included stating we will work Housing Association partners to assist with this.

In response to queries, the Housing Solutions Manager stated that the amendments would put the Housing Allocation Scheme more in line with other local authorities in Kent. The Head of Housing & Regulatory Services advised that the amendments would help manage the increasing number of incoming applications and offer housing where it was most needed.

Several Members raised concerns that people who were homeless, fleeing domestic abuse and carers for vulnerable people may be negatively impacted if the family connection criteria were removed. It was raised that an Equality Impact Assessment may be useful to assess this. The Head of Housing & Regulatory Services reassured the Committee that there were specialist officers in the Housing team who worked with victims of domestic abuse with procedures in place if they had not been referred through the police or social services.

The Committee were uneasy with the idea of removing the family connection criteria completely, instead opting to suggest it be changed from 5 to 6 years. It was proposed that paragraph 3.14 of Option A be amended to remove the family connection criteria and would read:

"The current 'Returning Resident' criteria will be removed and applicants will no longer be able to join the housing register through this connection."

It was also proposed to change paragraph 9.3 of Appendix 1 to the report to read:

"Family - the applicant must have immediate family that has been residing within Maidstone Borough for a continuous period of 6 years immediately prior to the application. The Council may confirm these details with other data held internally."

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme, as set out at Option A, be adopted subject to the requested amendments.

47. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.19 p.m.