

Housing Allocation Scheme Consultation Report

June 2023

1. Aim of the consultation

- 1.1 Barnet Council is revising its Housing Allocation Scheme in line with the statutory requirement to keep it under review and to take into account the priorities of the administration as well as feedback from the Housing Options service to improve clarity and the smooth-running of the policy or to confirm the approach where discretion is currently taken.
- 1.3 The three main changes to the scheme are:
- To revert to a two reasonable offers policy, meaning an applicant would not be sanctioned after refusing their first offer.
 - After allocating homes to secure tenants living on a regeneration estate, at the point of decanting a non-secure tenant the council will look to provide a new home on that regeneration estate for any non-secure tenant owed a main homelessness duty (under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996) who has held that non-secure tenancy for five years or more at the point vacant possession of the property is sought.
 - Under a local lettings policy the council will give priority for local people living on any regeneration estate to be allocated a new home on that estate ahead of those who are otherwise waiting for housing and even if their home is not being demolished.
- 1.3 As part of the development of the scheme, a consultation was held to seek residents' and stakeholders' feedback on the draft policy. The Housing Allocation Scheme consultation ran for ten and a half weeks, from 5 April 2023 to 18 June 2023. It primarily consisted of an online survey on Engage Barnet. Supporting documents were also available on Engage Barnet, allowing interested parties to view the draft policy.
- 1.4 A number of targeted focus groups were also held to give residents and partner agencies an opportunity to give feedback on the draft policy.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The questionnaire was available on the council's consultation webpage Engage Barnet, with paper copies available on request. The questionnaires asked respondents how much they agreed with the main changes being proposed. In total, 40 responses were received through Engage Barnet. There were free text boxes that allowed respondents to add in comments.
- 2.4 The consultation was well publicised through various mediums including:
- Email sent to all Private Registered Providers operating within the borough, encouraging them to review the proposals and respond to the consultation.
 - Email sent to key homelessness services partner agencies, encouraging them to review the proposals and respond to the consultation.
 - The council's social media channels, primarily on Twitter where the council has over 25,000 followers.
 - A paid Facebook and Instagram advertising campaign, which targeted people living in Barnet.
 - The Barnet Group's and its subsidiaries' social media channels, primarily on Twitter and Instagram where The Barnet Group has over 3,000 followers.
 - Prominent feature on the council's website and promoted in a press release following the review by the Housing and Growth Committee.

- Promoted in the council’s Barnet First magazine, which is sent to all residents in the borough.
- Promoted in the council’s Barnet Together CTN community news e-bulletin.
- Promoted in the Barnet Homes resident magazine atHome, which is distributed to over 13,000 homes.
- Promoted to involved residents by Barnet Homes.
- Promoted through a signature block in the emails of key frontline staff of the council and Barnet Homes as well as Labour councillors.
- Key council departments, managers, and staff from a range of stakeholder service areas were briefed on the proposed Housing Strategy and were given opportunity to provide feedback.

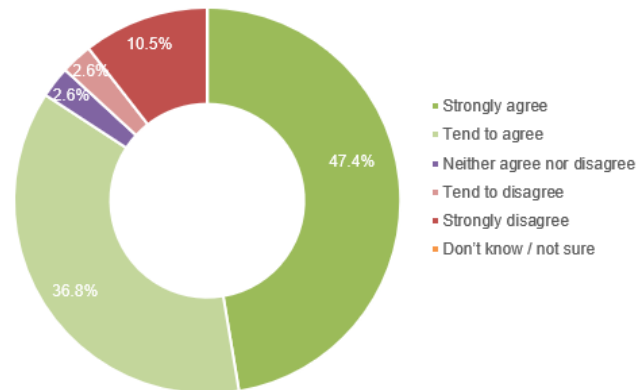
2.5 In total, there were 44 attendees at targeted focus groups; these included groups for council residents who have recently been housed, care leavers, adult social care clients, and key homelessness services partner agencies.

2.6 The Greater London Authority (GLA) was also invited to review the draft Housing Allocation Scheme and provide feedback.

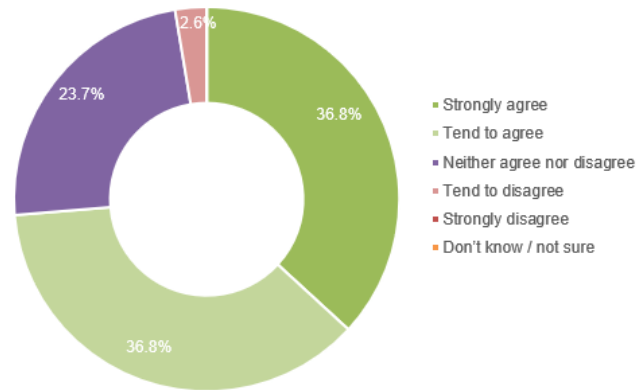
3. Summary of key findings

3.1 The questionnaire asked respondents if they agreed with the main changes being proposed. The results are shown below.

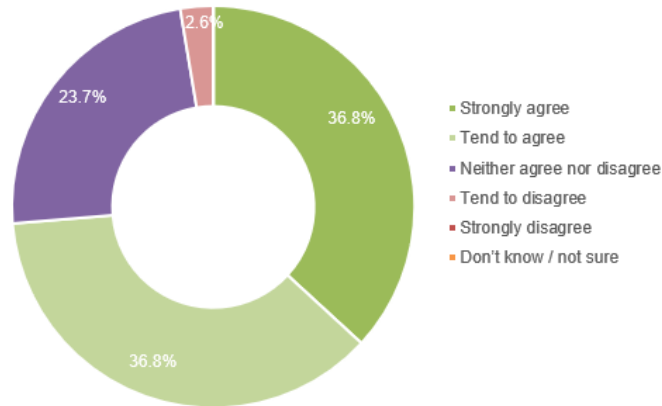
3.2 84.2% agreed with the change to revert from one suitable offer to two suitable offers of accommodation.



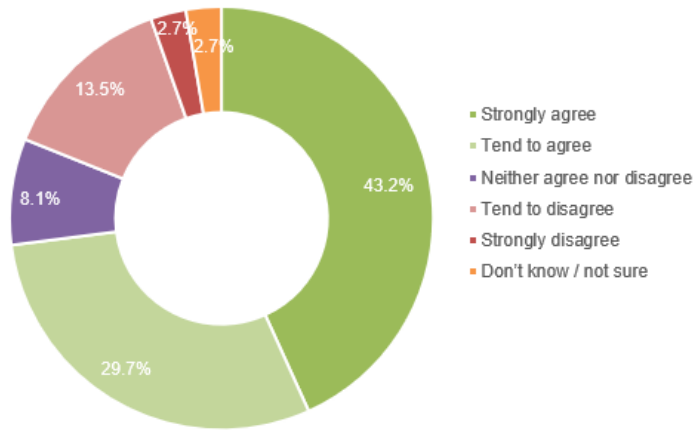
3.3 73.7% agreed with the proposed new local lettings policy that will ensure that after allocating homes to secure tenants living on a regeneration estate, at the point of decanting a non-secure tenant of at least five years who is owed a main homeless duty, the council will look to provide a new home for them on the estate if there are available properties.



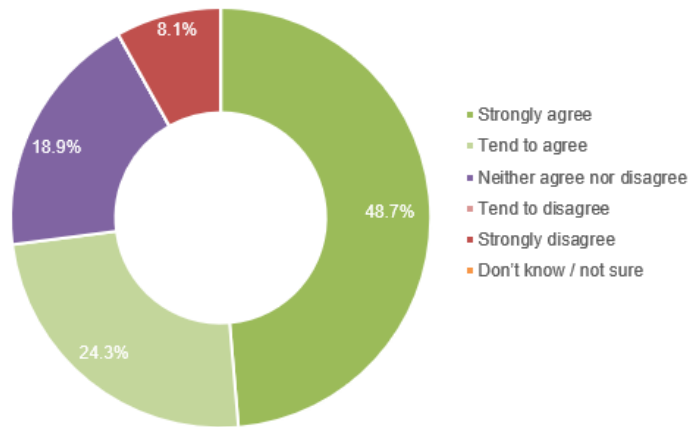
3.4 73% agreed with the proposed new local lettings policy that will additionally give priority to local people living on a regeneration estate to be allocated a new home on that estate ahead of those who are otherwise waiting for housing, even if their home is not being demolished.



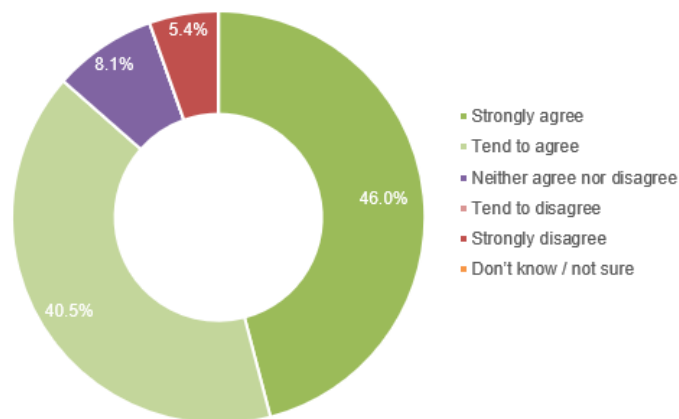
3.5 73% agreed with the proposed clarification regarding discretionary succession that makes it clear additional household members will only be considered to be part of the succession application if they lived with the tenant for at least a year before the tenant's death.



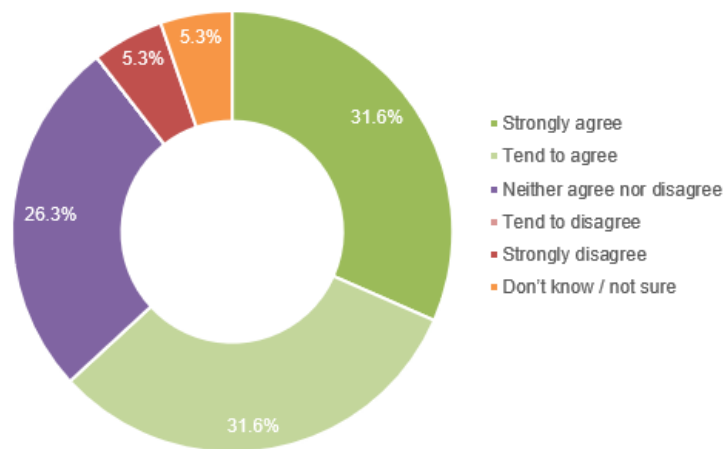
3.6 73% agreed with the proposed change to allow any other household member, such as adult children, to be included in the application if they have been part of the household for at least 12 months prior to the application, and they reside with the applicant as part of their household.



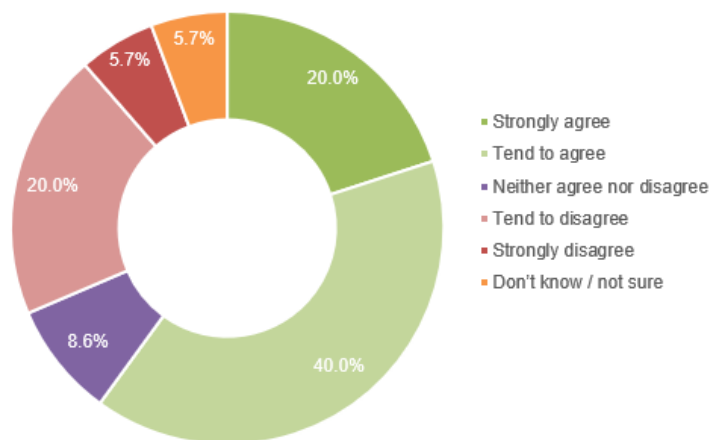
3.7 86.5% agreed with the proposed inclusion of young people / residents within the applicant's household if they leave the family home solely to attend university outside the borough and return to the same family home.



3.8 63.2% agreed with the proposed change to allow an applicant and their partner to jointly contribute for the required 64 hours' work per month for 6 out of the last 12 months if their working arrangements are to facilitate child care arrangements.



3.9 60% agreed with the proposed change to reduce the age from 1 year to 6 months as the limit for a household with a baby who will be considered to need a 1-bedroom property. [note: this part of the policy has subsequently been updated to allow a household with a baby of any age to be considered to need a 2-bedroom property]



3.10 A question was included to seek comments from respondents if they disagreed with any of the main proposed changes. There were four comments about the proposed change to identified bedroom need for households with a baby, stating that babies should not need their own bedroom or that babies should be able to share with their mother until they are at least one year old. There was one comment suggesting that live-in guardians should be considered as a priority for rehousing by the council. There was one comment that three offers of social housing should be made. There was one comment that people in permanent homes that are not due to be demolished should not be placed above those on the housing needs register.

3.11 A question was also included to seek any other comments on the draft Housing Allocation Scheme. These included:

- comments about lack of available housing
- support for moving to two offers (and a perception of unfairness for those who have been housed under the outgoing policy)
- a suggestion that applicants who are homeless due to being evicted by a friend or family member should have additional priority if they do not access temporary accommodation
- a comment about excluding people through the local area connection policy
- a suggestion that the council should adopt a Choice Based Lettings approach.
- a request from a private registered provider for the council to review its allocation procedures to minimise the risk of longer void (empty home) periods due to the move to two offers

- a suggestion that community contribution should give discretion to single mothers regarding ability to work 64 hours per month (*note: this discretion is already provided within the scheme*)
- a suggestion that only one offer should be made, and that any resident who has lived in the borough for their whole life should be able to apply for housing.

3.12 The focus groups provided opportunity for discussion about the Housing Allocation Scheme and the other key housing-related strategies and policies that Barnet Council is currently reviewing. These enabled quality discussions about residents' aspirations and areas of concern, in addition to being an opportunity to explain the documents in more detail. The focus groups indicated good support for the changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme. Attendees stated concerns about the following matters that are pertinent to the policy:

- The move to two offers was welcomed, although there was some discussion about whether three offers could be made.
- Request that the review / appeal process regarding offers is made clear to residents.
- The local lettings policies were welcomed.
- The additional clarity on household members and discretionary succession was welcomed.
- There was support for the other proposed main changes, particularly those regarding child-care responsibilities and bedroom allocation for households with a baby.

3.13 Discussions were also held with key council services that are affected by the Housing Allocation Scheme, including a detailed review with the Housing Options service that led to the identification of further minor changes to improve clarity.

3.10 All of the comments received have been reviewed and fed back into the strategy. Additional changes for clarity include:

- Section 1.8 - Clarification of the role that will take decisions to allocate properties outside of band and date order.
- Section 2.6 - Correction of the residential connection requirement for the "applicant or their partner" (rather than "and their partner")
- Section 2.7 - Clarification that housing-related debt of under £100 will not be considered.
- Section 2.8 - Clarification added regarding former social housing tenancy rent arrears for former Barnet Council tenancies and other former social housing tenancies.
- Section 2.8 - Clarification added that the council will not monitor whether the applicant has set up or adhered to a payment plan once a decision has been taken that they do not qualify for this rule.
- Section 2.9 - Additional information about how and when applicants can request discretion
- Section 3.2 - Correction of (non-related) live-in carers being added as household members in the first draft; this has been moved instead to bedroom need considerations; this would allow for carers to change, and does not bestow succession rights to carers.
- Section 3.8 - Additional detail added regarding the level of authorisation needed regarding applicants with connections to the council or The Barnet Group.
- Section 3.9 - Clarification regarding applications being cancelled if the applicant has had their homelessness resolved through Let2Barnet, an offer of accommodation, or finding their own private rented sector accommodation.
- Section 3.10 - Clarification regarding instances where the council does not accept justification for household members moving in added to worsening circumstances rules.

- Section 3.12 - Clarification added that the 21 days to request formal review of a decision comes from the date of being informed of the outcome of the informal review.
- Section 3.16 - Additional information added regarding size of accommodation to allow for households with a child under 5 with a need for two bedrooms to be considered for a 1-bedroom property if they choose.
- Section 3.16 - Additional information added regarding size of accommodation to allow for transferring households with a 1-bedroom need to be allocated a 2-bedroom property where there is availability and if they agree.
- Section 3.16 - Clarification added regarding how additional communal living rooms will be treated as a bedroom for the measurement of overcrowding and assessment of size of accommodation.
- Section 4.2 - Clarification added to summarise the requirements of applicants in order to be banded.
- Annex 1 - Clarification added to summarise the requirements of applicants in order to be banded.
- Annex 2 – Addition of live-in carer (where evidenced) resulting in a requirement for an additional bedroom
- Annex 2 – Addition of detail from section 3.16 regarding consideration for a property that is one bedroom size less than their assessed need
- Annex 2 – Addition of detail from section 3.16 regarding potential discretion for a 2-bedroom property for transferring households that are not considered to be statutorily overcrowded.
- Annex 3 - Correction to Community Contribution to remove “all household members” as needing to meet the qualification rules.
- Annex 3 – “Education” added to section title on evidence of training
- Annex 6 – “Personal Independence Payment” added.

4. Consultation questionnaire demographic characteristics

- 4.1 Most of the 40 questionnaire respondents were residents of Barnet (79%), while others responded as representatives of a private registered provider (e.g., a housing association) (15.8%), or a person who works in the borough (5.3%). 2 respondents chose to skip this question.
- 4.2 33.3% of respondents rented from a private landlord, 23.3% rented from the council, 16.7% owned their home outright, 13.3% rented from a registered social landlord, 3.3% were shared owners, 3.3% didn't know their housing tenure, and 6.7% preferred not to say.
- 4.3 The council is required by law, under the Equality Act 2010, to monitor respondents against the protected characteristics. These questions were only asked of respondents who indicated they were residents of the borough (30 respondents in total). Due to the low number of questionnaire respondents, a summary is provided in this report; however, the results are not considered to be statistically relevant. The diversity of respondents was improved through the targeted focus groups, which included people from a range of backgrounds and ages. Groups that the council typically finds hard to reach, including those experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping, were considered through the focus group with key partner agencies who were asked to consider the needs of their clients in their engagement with the council.
- There was a mix of responses across the age bands, with most respondents aged 35-44 (34.6%), and 65-74 (23.1%).
 - 80% were female and 16% were male.
 - 92.3% of respondents said that their sex was the same as the sex they were assigned at birth, and 7.7% preferred not to say.

- 42.3% of respondents were White British, with 7.7% each from a Black African, Mixed White and Asian, Mixed White and Black African, and White Other background, and 3.9% each from an Asian Indian, Other Asian, Black Caribbean, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, and Mixed Other background.
- 32% of respondents said they considered themselves to have a disability.
- 45.8% of respondents were Christian, 20.8% had no religion or belief, 4.2% were Buddhist, 4.2% were Hindu, and 25% preferred not to give their religion or belief.
- 75% of respondents were heterosexual, 4.2% were bisexual, and 16.7% preferred not to give their sexual orientation.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The findings from the consultation overall show strong support for the revised Housing Allocation Scheme.

5.2 We thank all those who took the time to respond to the Housing Allocation Scheme consultation.