

## **APPENDIX 3- Equalities Impact Assessment**

### **Summary**

- The Housing Act 1996 requires all local authorities to have a scheme for allocating council and housing association rented homes in the borough. The Localism Act 2011 increases the flexibilities to develop schemes that reflect local priorities.
- Changes to the housing allocations scheme are required to ensure that scarce resources are allocated on a fair and consistent basis and to bring Barnet into line with allocations schemes in neighbouring boroughs.
- The specific changes include increasing residential connection to five years, excluding applicants from the scheme for two years when they refuse a reasonable offer of accommodation and providing victims of domestic violence with emergency accommodation so that the risk to their life is removed.
- Barnet is an area of high demand for housing. The number of households presenting as homeless and the number of households being accepted as homeless has increased significantly over the past five years. The number of new temporary accommodation admissions has also risen. Housing supply has not kept up with increased demand for housing services.
- The data suggests that the proposals will have an unavoidable minimum negative impact because there is greater diversity amongst social housing tenants in comparison with the Barnet borough population as a whole and the diversity of current applicants applying for social housing is greater still.
- The data for applicants is based on applicants in the last year. The application profile is fluid and subject to change.
- There is limited data available on disability and this will be followed up. There is no data available on sexual orientation.
- It appears that the five year residential connection requirement may have a minimum negative impact at both the younger and older end of the age range. In the data sample approximately 33 applicants are under the age of 35 (9% of 387) and 10 (3% of 387) applicants over 75 would no longer be eligible for housing assistance.
- Similarly, the data suggests that older people over the age of 55 are more likely to refuse an offer of accommodation than younger people which might result in them being excluded from the allocations scheme. In the sample of 387 households, 47 are over the age of 55 (12% of 387).
- The evidence shows that only 4 cases in the last two years would be impacted by the proposed change on domestic violence. The proposal is driven primarily through the safeguarding agenda and the paramount need for safety for victims and their children. Although the proposal may appear to have a disproportionate impact on women and children, the numbers are small and the mitigation is that existing secure tenants would transfer or gain a new tenancy on the same secure terms.

### **Recommendations**

- While preliminary indications suggest that the overall impact of these proposals is likely to result in a minimum negative impact, the EIA is recording the impact as not known in order to continue to monitor the impact of the changes. Any untoward trends will be followed up as the allocations scheme is kept under review.
- The EIA therefore recommends no change to the proposals outlined in this paper.

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### Increasing residential connection

<b>What happens now</b>	Applicants have to generally live in the borough for TWO years before they qualify for rehousing.
<b>What is proposed</b>	Applicants will have to live in the borough for FIVE years before they qualify for rehousing. The council will continue to meet its obligations to homeless households with less than five years connection in terms of providing temporary accommodation.
<b>Rationale</b>	This will reinforce the message that there is only limited social housing in Barnet. It will increase the opportunity for long-term regeneration non-secure tenants to be shortlisted for social housing when they are decanted. A six month sample of 387 customers <sup>1</sup> showed that 17% would not have been placed in any band if the residential connection had been 5 years. Across one year, potentially 132 households would be excluded from the scheme. The same sample also showed that 12% of applicants would have had their priority reduced to Band 4. (Although TA would have been provided for these applicants, with the focus on procuring private sector accommodation in more affordable areas and support and communications for customers encouraging them to find PRS themselves, it is anticipated that Band 4 customers will start to be moved on from TA more quickly in the future). The change would also bring residential connection in line with most other North London boroughs.

Equalities question	Issues/risks	Mitigations/comments
Are there differential service outcomes for the different communities using our services?	<p>Analysis of the equalities data of the sample of 387 banded customers highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 68% were female, 32% were male</li> <li>• 16% were aged 18 to 24, 31% were 25 to 34, 26% were 35 to 44, 14% were 45 to 54, 8% were 55 to 64, 2% were 65 to 74 and 2% 75 plus</li> <li>• 28% were White households, 22% Black, 6% Asian and there were 31% Other ethnicities</li> <li>• The largest faith groups are Blank (not recorded) at 68% then Christian at 10% and Muslim at 9%</li> <li>• Only 3% (11) of the 387 households had recorded a disability.</li> </ul> <p>The 64 households in the same sample that may be excluded because they have less than 5 years local connection had a similar profile with the</p>	<p>Regular analysis of the applicants will be needed to ensure that specific groups are not being adversely affected. The Barnet Homes Customer Insight Group meets on a 6 weekly basis. Part of the remit of the Group is to monitor the equalities impacts on housing applicants. The Group will monitor the impact of the allocations scheme.</p> <p>Barnet Homes has implemented a new housing management system which will improve the recording of data on disabilities.</p> <p>When housing applicants are considered for rehousing disability needs are taken into account in terms of assessing their overall housing need and banding status.</p> <p>Consideration has also been given to</p>

<sup>1</sup> All customers banded in the 6 months from October 2013 to March 2014

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	<p>following differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female and males are slightly more balanced at 61% female, 39% male</li> <li>• Younger and older people are more represented- 38% of the sample is aged 25 to 34 and 8% is 75+</li> <li>• There are proportionally more Black (27%) and Other (39%) households in the sample and fewer White households (18%)</li> <li>• Although there is limited data on disability there do not appear from the sample to be more disabled applicants excluded from the scheme as a result of extending residential connection.</li> </ul>	<p>implementing a residential connection of 3 or 4 years. In the sample, 46 would be excluded if the policy was 3 years and 55 excluded if the policy was 5 years. Whilst this would mean that slightly fewer households would be excluded, it does not change the overall equalities impact of the proposals.</p> <p>Following on from the consultation the residential connection section of the allocations scheme has been amended slightly to allow for some discretion to band and award residential connection to out of borough placements by Adults and Children's Services and for housing association tenants when the Council can make use of the resulting void. The change will also cover exceptional circumstances, for example high risk and high support Domestic Violence cases.</p>
Will the delivery of any proposed new services or functions increase satisfaction ratings amongst different groups of residents'?	<p>Applicants who are not banded because they do not have 5 years local connection will be dissatisfied.</p> <p>However the survey results suggest that residents generally and housing applicants in particular are supportive of the principle that long-standing residents should be given priority for housing. This proposal helps make this happen.</p>	<p>The council will continue to meet its statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation to homeless households with less than 5 years local connection.</p>
Does the proposal enhance Barnet's reputation as a good place to work and live?	<p>Barnet is a popular place in which to live and work and there is a high demand for housing. The allocations scheme has to reflect the fact that there is a limited supply of housing available and that priority is given to established households in the highest need.</p>	<p>Barnet will continue to be a good place in which to live and work. The allocations scheme is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it meets housing needs and reflects the reality of the housing market.</p>

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Will members of Barnet's diverse communities feel more confident about the council and the manner in which it conducts its business?	The proposed allocations scheme meets the requirements for the council to prioritise applicants with a strong residential connection to access limited housing supply.	A key issue in terms of building confidence is demonstrating that the council is operating housing allocations consistently and fairly. As the Customer Insight Group is regularly monitoring the operation of allocations, it may be appropriate to publish through the Barnet Homes website anonymised information on the types of people being rehoused.
How will the new proposals enable the council to promote good relations between different communities?	The allocation of housing is used to ensure that housing need is met in a sustainable and affordable way which helps to promote good relations between different communities.	
How have residents with different needs been consulted on the anticipated impact of this proposal? How have any comments influenced the final proposal?	The council has consulted with residents with different needs in a number of ways, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of current housing applicants</li> <li>• Survey of Citizen's Panel members</li> <li>• Communities Together Network event.</li> </ul>	

### Exclusion from allocations scheme for 2 years when applicant refuses reasonable offer of accommodation

<b>What happens now</b>	Applicants who have refused one reasonable offer of accommodation are excluded from the allocations scheme for ONE year.
<b>What is proposed</b>	Applicants will be excluded from the allocations scheme for TWO years if they refuse one reasonable offer of accommodation.
<b>Rationale</b>	In the past six months 25 housing offers were refused by applicants. Of these, 7 decisions have been reviewed (the stage after the first appeal), of which 2 were found in favour of the customer. Increasing the exclusion period to two years will help convey the reality that there is very limited housing supply and that turning down a suitable offer is a serious decision which has significant consequences.

Equalities question	Issues/risks	Mitigations/comments
Are there differential service outcomes for the different communities using our services?	Analysis of data on housing applicants <sup>2</sup> indicates the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older people aged over 55 are more likely to refuse an offer of accommodation than</li> </ul>	Housing Revenue Account self-financing is being used to increase the number of housing units for specific customers, including older people and people with needs for wheelchair accessible

<sup>2</sup> Applicants banded in 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 year

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	<p>all households</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People aged 16 to 44 are less likely to refuse an offer of accommodation than all households</li> <li>• Some ethnic groups are more likely to refuse an offer of accommodation than all households (particularly Black African, Black Other), other groups less likely (Asian British/Other, White Other)</li> <li>• There is very little information available on disability but from the data that is available disabled applicants appear to be no more likely to refuse an offer than non-disabled applicants.</li> </ul>	<p>homes. This will improve the offer of housing to these groups.</p> <p>Applicants with an assessed need for level access accommodation will be offered level access accommodation under the proposals whereas at present these properties are not reserved for this group.</p> <p>Young people may be offered shared accommodation where this means that the accommodation is affordable and will help the young person to obtain skills in managing a tenancy.</p> <p>Access to different community, including faith, facilities will be important in assessing the suitability of offers of accommodation under the Placements Policy.</p> <p>Regular analysis of the applicants excluded because they refused an offer will be undertaken by the Customer Insight Group to ensure that specific groups are not being adversely affected.</p>
<p>Will the delivery of any proposed new services or functions increase satisfaction ratings amongst different groups of residents'?</p>	<p>Applicants may be less satisfied with their offer if they feel that they have been forced into a property that they feel does not meet their needs.</p> <p>Barnet Homes currently monitors new tenant satisfaction with their homes and will be able to assess whether satisfaction increases or declines as a result of the one-offer only policy.</p> <p>Residents support the proposal according to the</p>	<p>It will be important to clearly communicate the suitability of a property to enable applicants to understand that the property meets their assessed needs. Applicants will still have the right of a review of their offer if they feel that it is unsuitable and if the review finds that an offer was not suitable will be given a second offer.</p> <p>Regular analysis of the applicants who are successful in a review of offer will be needed to</p>

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	survey of the citizen's panel although existing applicants are less likely to support this.	<p>ensure that specific groups are not being adversely affected.</p> <p>Monitoring of suitability of the offers made by officers is required to ensure consistency of approach.</p> <p>Property satisfaction monitoring could be extended to include private rented sector offers when they are used to discharge duty.</p>
Does the proposal enhance Barnet's reputation as a good place to work and live?	Barnet is a popular place in which to live and work and there is high demand for housing. The allocations scheme has to reflect the fact that there are limited properties available that are affordable, particularly for households affected by welfare reforms.	Barnet will continue to be a good place in which to live and work. The Allocations Scheme is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it meets housing needs and reflects the reality of the housing market.
Will members of Barnet's diverse communities feel more confident about the council and the manner in which it conducts its business?	Communication of the one offer only policy is essential to ensure that applicants understand that their needs have been assessed and that the offer of a property is reasonable and fair.	<p>This will reduce the amount of time properties are left empty and reduce void costs. Applicants will have their housing needs met more quickly.</p> <p>Regular updates on the Barnet Homes website on housing supply and demand will help reinforce the message to housing applicants that it is reasonable for one offer to be made and that there is a very limited supply of accommodation.</p>
How will the new proposals enable the council to promote good relations between different communities?	The allocation of housing is used to ensure that housing need is met in a sustainable and affordable way which helps to promote good relations between different communities.	
How have residents with different needs been consulted on the anticipated impact of this proposal? How have any comments influenced the final proposal?	<p>The council has consulted with residents with different needs in a number of ways, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of current housing applicants</li> <li>• Survey of Citizen's Panel members</li> <li>• Communities Together Network event.</li> </ul>	

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### Provide domestic violence victims with emergency accommodation

<b>What happens now</b>	The current Allocations Scheme gives a Band 1 status to those who have an exceptional need to move due to domestic abuse, extreme violence or extreme harassment. This exceptional need only exists if there is a clear threat of violence to the applicant whilst they remain in their current home. This does not necessarily mean that these applicants move immediately because there may not be a suitable property available. Therefore the applicant may remain in their current home and be exposed to the risk.
<b>What is proposed</b>	Applicants who need to move due to domestic abuse, extreme violence or extreme harassment will be moved into emergency accommodation immediately and be removed from the risk to their life.
<b>Rationale</b>	The existing policy is encouraging customers to stay in unsafe accommodation where their lives are put at risk. By being placed in Band 1, applicants are given the impression that they will be rehoused through the Allocations Scheme into an alternative home immediately. With the severe lack of housing available in Barnet, this is not the reality. Securing suitable alternative accommodation, even for housing applicants in Band 1, can take a considerable amount of time. It is therefore safer and more sensible to move customers into emergency accommodation immediately so that they are no longer at risk. As a responsible organisation, the London Borough of Barnet does not want to encourage customers to put themselves at risk and this is why the change has been suggested.

Equalities question	Issues/risks	Mitigations/comments
Are there differential service outcomes for the different communities using our services?	<p>The vast majority of the victims of domestic violence are women and children, and women are also considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence, and sexual abuse. Women may experience domestic violence regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, age, sexuality, disability or lifestyle.</p> <p>Between April 2012 and March 2014 there were 4 applicants placed into band 1 with an exceptional need to move due to domestic abuse, extreme violence or extreme harassment. Overall over this period there were 145 applicants placed in band 1 and represents 2.7% of all band 1 cases were in this category.</p>	<p>Remaining in their existing accommodation may put vulnerable people in further danger. It is better to place them in safety in emergency accommodation while a more long-term solution is arranged.</p> <p>Where the applicant is an existing secure tenant, they would not necessarily have to apply for rehousing through the Allocation Scheme's banding system. Rather their Housing Officer can highlight the case as having an exceptional need to move and apply to have the tenant moved as a management transfer. Once moved, the tenant will sign a secure tenancy on the same conditions as the previous tenancy that they held. For those who are secure tenants from other local authorities, Barnet Homes can discuss reciprocal</p>

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		<p>agreements with those other authorities so as to allow the applicant to retain their secure tenant status. The North London Housing Partnership which includes Barnet, Camden, Islington, Westminster, Enfield and Haringey has developed a DV reciprocal agreement that commenced in October 2013 which allows secure tenants to move across these boroughs.</p> <p>Where an applicant is fleeing domestic violence and is not a secure tenant of any authority or where a reciprocal agreement is not possible, the customer will be assessed under the provisions of the Allocations Scheme. In such cases, if the Band 1 status is removed, the customer may be banded into either Band 2, 3 or 4, or may not qualify for the scheme at all dependent on the outcome of an detailed housing assessment, that considers all details of the customers individual case including the level of threat they face, their priority need and residential history.</p> <p>There will still be discretion in band 1 for the most severe cases of domestic violence, regardless of tenure.</p>
Will the delivery of any proposed new services or functions increase satisfaction ratings amongst different groups of residents'?	Victims of domestic violence may be less satisfied initially that they have to move to emergency accommodation but given the fact that the policy is intended to secure their safety they should be satisfied in the long-term.	The proposal does not mean that existing secure tenants will have to surrender their tenancy as outlined above.
Does the proposal enhance Barnet's reputation as a good place to work and live?	Barnet is a popular place in which to live and work and there is high demand for housing. The allocations scheme has to reflect the fact that there are limited properties available.	Barnet Council will continue to support victims of domestic violence and their children by ensuring that they are rehoused out of danger in temporary accommodation while more long-term plans can



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Will members of Barnet's diverse communities feel more confident about the council and the manner in which it conducts its business?	The allocation of housing is used to ensure that housing need is met in a sustainable and affordable way which helps to promote good relations between different communities.	be made. Barnet Council has a duty to safeguard vulnerable people including those affected by domestic violence. The proposed change supports the Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy by providing safe accommodation out of danger and where appropriate extra security in the existing home through the Sanctuary Scheme.
How will the new proposals enable the council to promote good relations between different communities?	The allocation of housing is used to ensure that housing need is met in a sustainable and affordable way which helps to promote good relations between different communities.	
How have residents with different needs been consulted on the anticipated impact of this proposal? How have any comments influenced the final proposal?	The council has consulted with residents with different needs in a number of ways, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of current housing applicants</li> <li>• Survey of Citizen's Panel members</li> <li>• Communities Together Network event.</li> </ul>	

### Other proposals

Proposal	Comments
Applicants will have to work for at least 16 hours per week to be given additional priority for housing.	There is currently no hourly requirement for working households but it makes sense to align this with being exempted from the overall benefit cap so that the applicant is not reliant on benefits. Some protected groups may be unable to work 16 hours per week, in particular older and disabled applicants but there is discretion in the scheme to reduce or remove these requirements when a housing assessment finds that this is appropriate.
Applicants will have to volunteer for at least 16 hours per week to be given additional priority for housing.	Volunteers currently have to volunteer for 10 hours per month but it makes sense for this to be aligned with working households. Similarly, there is discretion in the scheme so that the requirements for older and disabled applicants can be reduced.
Applicants will have to train for at least 16 hours per week to be given additional priority for housing.	Volunteers currently have to train for 10 hours per month but it makes sense for this to be aligned with working and volunteering households. Similarly,

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Proposal	Comments
	there is discretion in the scheme so that the requirements for older and disabled applicants can be reduced.
Applicants on paternity leave may qualify for additional priority where they intend to go back to work.	This brings the policy in line with the position on maternity leave.
Young people leaving care will not be required to make a community contribution to be placed in band 2.	Evidence suggests that young people leaving care are remaining in temporary accommodation for a long period because they do not fully meet the community contribution requirements. By placing these young people in band 2 they are more likely to obtain a secure tenancy and then they can be encouraged to take up training and/or employment through the council's flexible tenancy policy.
Service tenants retiring after 15 years of service will not be entitled to one extra bedroom than they need.	These applicants are likely to be older people. In the current climate, where there is a very limited supply of housing and high demand, it is not appropriate to offer former service tenants something that all other applicants are not given- one more bedroom than they need. Former service tenants will still be given priority for housing in the scheme but only housing that meets their bedroom requirements. It is also inappropriate to deliberately cause under-occupation when it may be subject to benefit reductions.