

Lettings Policy Review 2025

Date: 12 February 2025

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

Under Housing Act 1996 Leeds City Council is required to publish a lettings policy, setting out how it manages applications for housing, which groups are given reasonable preference for offers and how it allocates its housing stock.

Since the last lettings policy review in February 2019, Leeds has seen an increase in demand for social housing from applicants in housing need at the same time the number of properties available to let has reduced, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

In December 2023 Executive Board gave approval for Housing Leeds to consult on proposed changes to the lettings policy, to enable the council to respond to the increase in demand for social housing. Executive Board also approved the temporary suspension of the Date of Registration and Tenant Transfer lettings quotas, to enable council homes to be let based on housing need.

Housing Leeds has completed the consultation on proposed changes to the lettings policy and now seeks approval of the changes outlined in this report.

The report also updates Executive Board on government proposals relating to rehousing members of the armed forces, young care leavers and people experiencing domestic abuse.

Recommendations

- a) Executive Board note the results of the consultation and full equality impact assessment.
- b) Executive Board approve the changes and implementation to the new lettings policy as proposed in this report and summarised in section 10.14.
- c) The Director of Communities, Housing and Environment will be responsible for implementation of the recommendations in this report.

What is this report about?

1. The report updates Executive Board on current housing pressures and the results of the lettings policy consultation and seeks approval to implement the changes set out in this report.
2. The report also updates Executive Board on government proposals relating to rehousing members of the armed forces, young care leavers and people experiencing domestic abuse.

What impact will this proposal have?

3. Historically Leeds has operated an open housing register with limited restrictions on who can join the register. This includes accepting applications from customers who are not assessed as being in the statutory housing need or reasonable preference groups, which has resulted in a register of over 28,000 households. The majority of applicants on the register have little or no prospect of being offered a council home.
4. Approval of the proposals will change how we manage the Leeds Homes Register and how we allocate council homes. It will also impact on our nominations arrangements with partner housing associations. There will be greater focus on meeting housing need in the city and reducing the use of temporary accommodation.
5. Housing Leeds has continued to see an increase in demand for housing. At the end of 2024/25 Quarter 2 there were 28,677 households on the Leeds Homes Register, 19% were in urgent housing need (Band A and A+).
6. The number of households in temporary accommodation continues to rise, with 506 households being accommodated in January 2025. The council is under a duty to provide temporary accommodation to households who are believed to be eligible, homeless and in priority need. The council may also accommodate single households in temporary accommodation if they are at risk of, or known to be rough sleeping. Historically Leeds has always had very low levels of temporary accommodation placements, however, since 2022 we have seen a year on year increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation. In 2022 the number was 166, in 2023 the number was 212, and in 2024 the number was 501 which equates to a 201% increase in the last three years.
7. The most recent published data available from is Quarter 1 2024/25 where Leeds reported 334 households in emergency accommodation. This is considerably less than Manchester (2,813), Liverpool (979), Birmingham (5,034), Bristol (1,554), Brighton and Hove (1,617).
8. A full Equality and Diversity Impact assessment has been completed to consider the impact of the lettings policy changes on equality groups. This is available in Appendix 3.

9. Details of changes and consultation responses

10.1 Reviewing the criteria for joining the housing register

10.1.1 Housing Leeds consulted on proposed changes to the qualification criteria, which sets out which groups can join the housing register and which are excluded.

10.1.2 The council must consider all applications made in accordance with its policy and accept applications from eligible and qualifying customers.

10.1.3 Local authorities have the power to set their own qualification criteria, provided it does not disqualify certain groups (Armed Forces, people fleeing domestic abuse, witness protection cases,

social housing tenants moving for work, Leeds care leavers and people likely to be in housing need) or on equality grounds.

10.1.4 The legislation allows the Council to apply qualification criteria even if it excludes some people who would fall into a reasonable preference category (homeless, medical needs, housing conditions or welfare / hardship reasons for needing to move), provided it doesn't exclude the majority of people in a preference category or discriminate unlawfully on equality grounds.

10.1.5 The table below summarises the proposals and consultation responses relating to the qualification criteria, in order of the level of support received in the consultation (percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number):

Proposal	Agree	Maybe	Disagree
Removing applicants who have income, savings or assets over £60K, or who own a residential property that could be sold	82% (2355)	11% (308)	8% (228)
Removing applicants without a local connection to Leeds (based on residence, employment or close family associations)	69% (1988)	16% (457)	16% (449)
Removing applicants who haven't lived in Leeds as their main residence for 2 years	63% (1792)	20% (578)	18% (517)
Restricting which adult household members can be added to a housing application to be rehoused	43% (1230)	29% (811)	29% (846)
Removing current social housing tenants who are adequately housed (LCC and housing association tenants in Band C and Band D)	39% (1088)	24% (685)	38% (1082)
Removing customers who are adequately housed (Band C and Band D)	31% (891)	19% (552)	50% (1441)

10.1.6 Housing Leeds has noted the consultation results and wishes to proceed with the following changes:

10.2 Customers with financial resources

10.2.1 Housing Leeds wishes to make applicants non-qualifying to join the housing register where they have a household income of over £60K pa, savings or assets of over £60K, or who own a residential property that could be sold.

10.2.2 Housing Leeds is proposing the income threshold is based the main and joint applicant, or main applicant plus their spouse or partner, and be exclusive of means tested benefits. This would help ensure social housing is allocated to customers who are unable to afford to access other options in the private sector.

10.2.3 Where an applicant disposes of an asset that brings them under the financial threshold, the council will consider whether they have deliberately worsened their circumstances and may reduce the degree of preference given for rehousing.

10.2.4 This change will require an update to the current housing application form to explain how the information will be used and to add a question about assets held, and resources would be required to verify financial information provided by customers.

10.2.5 Applicants are already required to indicate their income level and whether they have a financial interest in any property anywhere in the world but this information is not routinely verified currently. It would not be possible to proactively verify every applicant at the registration stage with existing resources, so a risk-based approach would be taken based on the information provided by customers, including proof of their income when they apply for housing. Further verification would take place in priority assessments and at pre-offer stage which would pick up on any changes in circumstances.

10.2.6 Housing Leeds would rely on the declaration applicants make when they apply for housing, which means the council may take action to recover a property if it was induced by false statements made by the applicant regarding their financial resources.

10.2.7 The proposal was strongly supported in the consultation, with many respondents suggesting a lower income threshold, although concerns were raised about applicants who need specific property types such as Retirement Life or an adapted home which they may not be able to afford despite exceeding the threshold.

10.2.8 A number of concerns were raised in the consultation which has resulted in the following exemptions being proposed:

- Applicants requiring Older Peoples Housing (55 and over for housing associations or 60 and over for LCC older people's housing).
- Current LCC and housing associations tenants in the Leeds City Council area including tenancy management moves for mutual exchange, tenancy management applications (sole to joint requests), applications from service tenants, use and occupation moves, clearance moves, court orders.
- Applicants who meet the criteria for a direct let award, e.g. urgent moves for hospital discharge, safeguarding etc.
- Corporate priorities e.g. on request from Social Care to facilitate kinship carers and Leeds' looked after children placed out of area.
- Travellers.
- Customers experiencing domestic abuse or violence, where the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or police or National Witness Mobility Scheme support the move for the person's safety.
- Government exemptions: Armed Forces (members, former members, spouses / partners including former partners), Social housing tenants in England moving to take up work under the Right to Move regulations.

10.2.9 Applicants in the reasonable preference groups or homeless acceptances would not be exempt (unless they also met one of the above exemption criteria) but would be given advice and assistance on how to secure accommodation in non-LCC accommodation.

10.3 Local connection and 2 years residence

10.3.1 The government guidance 'Providing social housing for local people' (2013) states: 'The Secretary of State believes that including a residency requirement is appropriate and strongly encourages all housing authorities to adopt such an approach. The Secretary of State believes that a reasonable period of residency would be at least 2 years.' This approach was re-iterated in December 2024 by the Secretary of State.

10.3.2 The Code goes on to state other qualification criteria could be adopted alongside the residency requirement, including close family association and employment in the district, to ensure that applicants who are not currently resident in the district who can still demonstrate a strong association to the local area are able to qualify.

10.3.3 Housing authorities must make an exception for all current and former members of the Regular Armed Forces and in certain circumstances their bereaved spouses or civil partners as well as certain members or former members of the Reserve Armed Forces.

10.3.4 Other exemptions included in the guidance are applicants experiencing violence or domestic abuse, people returning to the authority area who need support to resettle, homeless applicants or care leavers placed outside the authority area. It also recommends the authority has residual discretion to consider individual circumstances in exceptional cases.

10.3.5 Housing Leeds wishes to introduce a 2 year residency requirement or a local connection requirement where customers can evidence they have a close family association (where the family member has been resident in the Leeds area for a period of 5 years) or are in employment in Leeds.

10.3.6 Time detained in prison or hospital will not count towards the 2 years residence. Housing Leeds will consider whether the applicant had previously lived in Leeds in these scenarios.

10.3.7 There are 2,272 applicants registered with an address outside Leeds. The table below shows the band they are in (2024/25 Quarter 2):

Band	Number	%
Band A	127	6
Band A +	3	0
Band B	48	2
Band C	1983	87
Band D	111	5
Total	2272	100

10.3.8 Although these applicants do not currently reside in Leeds, they may have a local connection based on previous residence, close family associations or employment in Leeds.

10.3.9 The options of removing applicants who don't have a local connection to Leeds or applicants who haven't lived in Leeds as their main residence for over 2 years were well supported in the consultation.

10.3.10 Housing Leeds is proposing to exempt the following groups from this provision:

- Applicants requiring Older Peoples Housing (55 for housing associations and 60 for LCC).
- Current LCC and housing association tenants in the Leeds City Council area including tenancy management moves for mutual exchange, tenancy management applications (sole to joint requests), applications from service tenants, use and occupation moves, clearance moves, court orders.

- Applicants who meet the criteria for a direct let award, e.g. urgent moves for hospital discharge, safeguarding etc.
- Corporate priorities e.g. on request from Social Care to facilitate kinship carers, Leeds' looked after children placed out of area.
- Travellers.
- Customers experiencing domestic abuse or violence, where the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) or police or National Witness Mobility Scheme support the move for the person's safety, or where the applicant is accepted by Leeds City Council as homeless because of domestic abuse.
- Applicants who were placed in NASS accommodation in the Leeds area immediately prior to their positive decision or applicants accepted by Leeds City Council under government humanitarian schemes.
- Applicants who have been detained in prison or hospital in Leeds would not have this counted towards their 2 year residence, but we would consider previous residence in Leeds if they have no connection to another authority.

10.3.11 The following Government exemptions also apply: Armed Forces (members, former members, spouses / partners including former partners), social housing tenants in England moving to take up work under the Right to Move regulations.

10.3.12 This change will require an update to the housing application form to ask applicants to confirm they have resided in Leeds for two years, have a close family association with a family member living in the city for 5 years or are in employment in Leeds, and to explain this information will be used to assess whether they qualify to join the register. The housing application form will also need to ask if the customer falls into an exempt group.

10.3.13 Applicants in the reasonable preference groups or homeless acceptances would not be automatically exempt (unless they also met one of the above exemption criteria) but would be given advice and assistance on how to secure accommodation in non-LCC accommodation. Housing Leeds would consider applications from other customers with exceptional circumstances who would otherwise face undue hardship on a case-by-case basis.

10.4 Restrict which adult household members can be included on an application as a household member to be rehoused

10.4.1 Housing Leeds has a particular shortage of larger sized houses. Under the policy preference for houses is given to applicants with dependent children. Where a household adds another adult to their application, this increases the number of bedrooms they will be considered for, which puts further pressure on our larger housing stock.

10.4.2 The current policy states that normally, the council will only accept applications from customers and 'any person who normally resides with them as a member of their family, or any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with them'.

10.4.3 Housing Leeds wishes to restrict who can be added to a housing application so that people other than the main or joint applicant or partner are only accepted where there is an existing relationship and a demonstrable need for them to live with the applicant on a permanent basis. This measure is intended to manage demand for larger properties which are in extremely short supply and reduce and prevent under occupation.

10.4.4 The proposal to restrict which other adults can be added to an application was supported by most respondents who expressed a 'yes/ no' preference but 24% responded 'maybe'.

10.4.5 Housing Leeds is proposing we would normally only accept the following adults on an application with the main applicant:

- Joint applicant – spouse, civil partner or partner
- Adult children who have lived in the parental home for the previous 2 years
- Elderly parents or other family members who have a demonstrable need to live with the applicant for support related to disability or health

10.4.6 Housing Leeds would not generally accept the following:

- Adult children who do not live in the parental home on a permanent basis or who have not done for the previous 2 years.
- Other family members, including siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces and cousins.
- Friends or lodgers.
- Anyone else who does not currently live with the main applicant.

10.4.7 Housing Leeds would consider other factors including ill health or disability for example, where a family member has a care need that cannot be met elsewhere.

10.4.8 The council will give appropriate advice and assistance to applicants on their housing situation, including homeless prevention, likely wait times and the property type they will be considered for.

10.4.9 The current lettings policy provision which allows applicants who have a demonstrable need for an overnight carer to be allocated an additional bedroom allowance will remain in place.

10.5 Removing social housing tenants and applicants in Band C and D

10.5.1 The proposal to remove these bands was not well supported in the consultation. Although the lettings policy defines Band C as including customers in no assessed housing need, a lot of respondents disagreed, saying that many applicants in this band were struggling with their housing situation, for example, due to affordability.

10.5.2 Housing Leeds wishes to remove applicants in Band D which consists of customers who are not in assessed housing need and have no local connection, are not eligible for council housing or are homeowners.

10.5.3 Housing Leeds will consider the impact of removing Band C customers and social housing tenants in more depth before considering further any potential implementation of this proposal and would return to Executive Board for approval should this be taken forward.

10.5.4 There are 1140 customers in Band D, which represents 4% of the register. These customers will be contacted at their annual renewal and asked to update their housing application to determine whether they warrant a higher banding. Their application will be reassessed, and the relevant priority awarded. Otherwise, their application will be cancelled as non-qualifying.

10.5.5 Band D customers are generally only considered for an offer of accommodation after all other bands on the register, and in Q2 2024/25 only 3 households in Band D were rehoused, all into older people's housing.

10.5.6 There will be an exemption for older applicants who require older people's housing who will be able to remain on the register in Band C.

10.6 Changes to the qualification criteria and the impact on housing associations

10.6.1 The Leeds Homes Register is a common housing register shared with our partner housing associations. Currently Leeds has nomination rights to 100% of new housing association developments and minimum of 60% existing housing association stock. A nomination is classed as the rehousing of a customer in Band A or B of the housing register, or, for up to 15% of nominations, where a property is let based on the date of registration of the customer rather than their housing need.

10.6.2 Some housing associations expressed concern about the changes to the qualification criteria, including the income threshold. The proposed mitigations, particularly around older peoples housing, are outlined above. Housing associations can operate their own policies which would mean they can rehouse applicants independently, but these would not be considered as a nomination and would require customers to register with them directly.

10.7 Other proposals

10.7.1 The table below summarises the consultation responses relating to other proposals, in order of the level of support (percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number):

Proposal	Agree	Maybe	Disagree
Increasing the priority award period to 365 days	73% (2107)	15% (436)	12% (346)
Introducing a new direct offer category for homeless customers in temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast	65% (1870)	24% (698)	11% (314)
Changing quotas on a permanent basis, so that 100% of advertised council homes are let based on housing need	63% (1812)	23% (670)	14% (405)
To stop awarding a priority to households with dependent children to move out of high rise	46% (1323)	25% (727)	29% (836)
Increasing the age a household member needs their own bedroom from 16 to 18 years	37% (1062)	13% (379)	50% (1455)

10.8 Increase the length of time priority is awarded for

10.8.1 There was strong support from customers, housing providers and support agencies for increasing the period that priority is awarded for from 180 days to 365 to reflect more realistic timeframes for rehousing.

10.8.2 Housing Leeds wishes to implement this change. This will be implemented as new priorities are awarded and when extending existing priority awards.

10.8.3 The increase will free up resources required to manage the priority extension process and reduce customer contact but will also reduce the number of opportunities to review a housing application and give the relevant advice and support. Housing Leeds will identify customers in

priority who are not bidding or bidding inappropriately and will contact them proactively to advise them to bid or place them on auto bidding where the IT system will automatically bid on their behalf to ensure they do not miss out on advertised properties. Any offers resulting from an auto bid would be assessed to ensure they are suitable.

10.8.4 One support organisation has raised concerns about customers who have a priority award but who are not ready to live independently and so are not actively placing bids on properties. These customers will not be placed on auto bidding.

10.8.5 This change will likely increase the overall number of people in the priority bands A and B and support applicants who do not currently request a priority extension proactively.

10.9 A new Direct Let category for homeless customers and changes to the current homelessness Direct Let category

10.9.1 Housing Leeds consulted on a proposal to create a new direct let category for 'roofless' customers in temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast. This received strong support in the consultation, although some respondents were concerned this could incentivise moves to temporary accommodation.

10.9.2 The new direct let category will be introduced as an approved corporate objective direct let. This will be awarded for some customers in homeless temporary accommodation where it can be justified by extraordinary pressures, including budget pressures on the council. This does not mean every applicant in temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast would be made a direct let offer, because the council needs to be mindful of the needs of other applicants in high housing need. The direct let would be for a single offer of accommodation, the area will be dependent on the availability of properties.

10.9.3 The current Direct Let category for customers owed the full statutory homeless duty under section 193 Housing Act 1996 will remain. Currently homeless customers are only considered for a direct let where the council owes the full statutory duty to secure accommodation, and the applicant has been in Band A for 120 days. This provision dates to the introduction of the Leeds Homes Choice Based lettings system in 2003 and was intended to allow homeless customers the opportunity to express their preference for rehousing by bidding on available homes. The homeless pressures are now such that Housing Leeds is proposing to remove the 120 day delay in awarding the homeless direct let and instead award this at the point the customer is owed the full statutory duty.

10.10 Allocating the majority of properties to applicants in housing need on a permanent basis

10.10.1 The Housing Act 1996 requires the council to give customers in housing need 'reasonable preference' for offers of accommodation, which we do by awarding a priority on the Leeds Homes Register. The council also has a duty to secure accommodation for people we accept the 'full' homeless duty towards (note this accommodation does not need to be council housing). The council is permitted to include flexibility in the lettings policy to consider other groups, however, the increase in demand from customers in housing need means we are spending more money on temporary accommodation.

10.10.2 A greater proportion of allocations have been made to applicants in housing need since the Date of Registration and Tenant Transfer quotas were suspended. In 2024/25 Quarter 2, 89% of all general needs (ie not lettings of older people's housing) were made to customers in Band A and 6% to applicants in Band B.

10.10.3 Housing Leeds wishes to remove the date of registration and tenant transfer quotas permanently to ensure customers in high need have a greater chance of being rehoused. This means applicants in Band C are unlikely to be made an offer of accommodation other than in older peoples housing or under an age preference local lettings policy or the new build local lettings policy (currently under review).

10.11 To stop awarding a priority to households with dependent children to move out of high rise

10.11.1 The lettings policy was amended in 2019 so that households living in council high rise accommodation with dependent children who wish to move had their priority backdated to their original acceptance on the housing register. Pressures on housing are such that Housing Leeds wishes to remove this provision and stop awarding households priority to move out solely based on a child living in high rise. This means that high rise would be considered a suitable property offer for households with dependent children, for example, when making a final offer of accommodation to bring a legal duty to secure housing to an end.

10.11.2 Customers who already have a priority for rehousing from a high rise will retain their award and be able to continue bidding on their priority, but customers requesting new priorities will not receive an award for this reason. Priority to households seeking to move out of high rise will only be awarded if the household has other housing need under the lettings policy (eg medical needs or overcrowding), if there are extenuating circumstances to support a move or if there is a local lettings policy on the particular block meaning it is deemed unsuitable for children.

10.11.3 This proposal received 46% support in the consultation. Given the shortage of council accommodation, and particularly family sized houses, Housing Leeds wishes to implement this change.

10.11.4 Under the lettings policy, preference for offers of 2+ bedroom houses will continue to be given to households with dependent children ahead of other customers.

10.12 Increasing the age a household member needs their own bedroom from 16 to 18 years

10.12.1 Housing Leeds consulted on a proposal to increase the age a dependent child would need their own room from 16 to 18 years old. The proposal was not well supported in the consultation with many respondents raising concerns about safeguarding and welfare issues. Housing Leeds wishes to delay the implementation of this change pending further assessment of the potential impacts and ability to change our IT system to apply the change retrospectively to all existing applicants and recalculate overcrowding awards. Housing Leeds would return to Executive Board for approval should this be taken forward.

10.13 Other changes

10.13.1 The lettings policy will be updated to reflect current practices, including the move to any day advertising in place of the weekly advertising cycle, which has been approved through a delegated decision.

10.13.2 Housing Leeds wishes to strengthen the approach to tenancy and application fraud by introducing a new category for non-qualification where an applicant or member of their household has been found guilty of fraud, including where a tenant has been evicted from social housing for tenancy fraud. The period of non-qualification will be 5 years.

10.13.3 There are currently over 1000 applicants who have a direct let flag. Housing Leeds proposes to review the direct let cases and take a more proactive approach to reviewing future

direct let awards. The decision to award a direct let will take account of whether the applicant is likely to be offered accommodation in their preferred area, based on the stock turnover in that area.

10.13.4 Housing Leeds will be consulting on the future of local lettings policies and the local lettings policy for our new build homes and acquisitions. This includes local lettings policies with age preferences, good neighbour criteria, local connection and employment. The review will include high level consultation on the overall approach to local lettings policies and consultation in areas of the city that currently have approved local lettings policies in place. The final proposals will be considered through delegated decision by the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment in consultation with the Executive Member.

10.13.5 Leeds Housing Options works to a complex statutory framework where the homelessness duty it accepts is dependent on the specific circumstances of each individual household. The three duties that arise towards eligible households is the prevention (for those threatened with homelessness), the relief (for those who are legally homeless), and the main duty (for those who are homeless, in priority need, unintentionally homeless and have a local connection). The lettings policy will be updated to ensure greater clarity about what stage the council will make a priority award for each of the duties we may owe, and the circumstances that could result in a lower priority being made, for example a household being threatened with homelessness, in priority need, but not having a local connection to the city.

10.14 Summary of proposed changes:

To conclude, the changes proposed in this report are as follows:

- Removing applicants from the Register who have income, savings or assets over £60k, or who own residential property that could be sold (subject to exemptions outlined in this report).
- Removing applications without a local connection to Leeds or who haven't lived in Leeds as their main residence for 2 years (subject to exemptions outlined in this report).
- Restricting which adult household members can be added to a housing application to be rehoused (subject to individual circumstances as outlined in this report).
- Reviewing applications for customers in Band D, and where there is no housing need removing their application from the register.
- Priority awards will be made for 365 days to reflect increasing waiting times for social housing.
- Creating a new direct let category for homeless customers in temporary accommodation and removing the 120 day period for the current homeless direct let.
- The date of registration and tenant transfer quotas will be permanently removed, and properties will be allocated based on housing need.
- Customers will no longer be awarded priority to move solely based on having children living in high rise accommodation.

Other administrative changes will also be made as detailed above.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

- Secure housing is strongly linked to positive health, wellbeing and social inclusion, and the Lettings Policy determines which groups of customers are likely to be made offers of a council home or nominated to a housing association.
- Promotes a preventative and supportive approach to homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Promotes strong and sustainable neighbourhoods.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

11. Briefing sessions were held with Scrutiny Board in February and October 2024, at the Homeless Prevention Forum in February 2024, Housing Support Providers Forum February 2024 and with housing associations in March and July 2024.
12. An online customer consultation ran from January to March 2024 and was promoted through a banner on the Leeds Homes website directing users to the survey. Around 70% applicants place at least one bid each quarter and would see the details of the consultation this way. Communications were sent to tenants via the e-newsletter to inform them of the proposals and have an opportunity to comment. The consultation set out the background and reasons for the proposals, asked whether the respondent to give their response of support / don't support or maybe support the proposed change, with the opportunity to leave a comment on the proposal. Housing Leeds received nearly 3,000 responses to the online survey. A summary of the consultation outcomes is included in Appendix 1.
13. A survey was shared with housing associations and two information sessions were delivered at the Registered Providers Forum. A summary of responses is included in Appendix 2.

What are the resource implications?

14. Housing Leeds has considered the resources required to deliver the changes. The proposals are designed to support customers in the highest level of housing need, to reduce the use and cost of temporary accommodation and to make best use of our existing housing stock, especially our larger properties which are in short supply.
15. The Council's lettings policy impacts on the following areas:
 - The efficient management of the housing register – there are 28,677 applicants, of which 8,481 are in housing need. In 2023-24 the council let 3099 homes. Most applicants, including a number in Band A, currently have little or no prospect of being rehoused by the council. The changes proposed to the qualification criteria aim to reduce the number of applications the council manages to help reduce costs, although the resources required to manage the changes are likely to increase during the implementation.
 - Making best use of the limited properties that become available to let each year – ensuring that lettings are made to applicants in the highest housing need. This will be achieved by changes to the quotas, restricting who can join an application and stopping the award of priority solely based on a child living in high rise.
 - Aiming to reduce the number and length of temporary accommodation placements, which creates a significant budget pressure. This will be relieved by the introduction of a new direct let category for roofless customers in temporary accommodation and removing the 120 day period before statutory homeless customers are awarded a direct let.
 - The increase in the priority period will deliver savings to customer facing teams as the number of contacts will be reduced.
 - We need to consider the additional resources required to manage any changes to the housing register, for example, staff time to verify household income and assets, officer time to review decisions, legal officer time to manage any increase in challenges.
 - The implementation of some proposals will be dependent on changes to our IT system.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

16. The key risks relate to managing demand for council housing, which outstrips supply. The council must meet its duties under homelessness legislation and give reasonable preference to certain customer groups under the Housing Act 1996. The proposed changes will mean the council still complies with these duties while setting out a more robust way of managing customer expectations given the mismatch between demand and supply.
17. Any changes to the lettings policy will need to be implemented effectively and communicated to affected customers and stakeholders, especially if customers are removed from the register because of the review.
18. There is a risk of challenge by applicants disadvantaged by the proposed changes. Housing Leeds has developed an implementation plan which identifies which changes can happen in the short, medium or long term, depending on what changes are needed to the housing IT system or workplace practices. There is an impact on working practices in terms of how applications are assessed and how this will be resources. The trade unions have been made aware of the policy review and further details will be shared.
19. A full Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (attached in Appendix 3) has been completed and actions identified to mitigate any negative impacts. The outcomes of this assessment, in addition to the comments made by respondents to the consultation has resulted in mitigations and exemptions being included and the decision not to proceed with all the proposals at this point.
20. In October 2024 the government wrote to housing authorities to announce their intention to issue new guidance, including an ambition to house all veterans in need, exemptions from local connection and residence requirements for domestic abuse victims and young care leavers. Further details are expected in the coming months which may require further changes to the lettings policy. The guidance requiring councils to exempt armed forces from any residence or local connection criteria was issued in December 2024.

What are the legal implications?

21. The Housing Act 1996 requires every local housing authority to have an allocation scheme for determining which customers are prioritised for re-housing, and the procedure to be followed in allocating housing. This covers lettings of Council tenancies made by Housing Leeds and the Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation (BITMO), and nominations to Registered Social Landlords.
22. The Local Housing Authority must also have regard to its homelessness strategy and tenancy strategy.
23. The review is an opportunity to include some general housekeeping updates to the policy, such as updating references and the introduction of any day advertising which has been approved by a separate delegated decision.
24. There is a risk of legal challenge to the policy. Counsel advice on the proposals and implementation has been sought and actions taken to minimise the risk of successful challenge, as outlined in the section on risks above. The revised policy will include provision for the use of residual discretion to be applied and authorised by a senior manager for exceptional cases.
25. In developing the final version of the lettings policy consideration has been taken of the consultation responses and the outcome of the full EIA to ensure customers are assessed on an individual basis, and any exceptional circumstances are considered.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

26. The option of retaining the current Lettings Policy was ruled out due to the increase in demand for council homes and the increase in the use of temporary accommodation which means we are unable to revert to the previous flexibility of allocating homes to applicants who are not in assessed housing need. The Date of Registration and Tenant Transfer quotas had been suspended temporarily, so the review has been an opportunity to consult on the proposals to permanently remove them, and there have been other changes to the lettings process that need to be incorporated into a new policy.

How will success be measured?

27. The changes to the lettings policy will not address the issues of demand being experienced by Leeds and authorities across the country. The review aims to manage demand more effectively by removing certain groups from the housing register and restricting which applications will be accepted, freeing up resources currently spent managing priority extension requests and giving applicants a more realistic understanding of whether they are likely to be offered a council home.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

28. Some changes can be implemented sooner than others, depending on whether the measure is dependent on a change to the IT system. Housing Leeds plans to phase the implementation throughout 2025/26. Some measures will be introduced for new applicants and phased in for existing applicants as part of their annual renewal process to give applicants an opportunity to update their housing application.

29. The lettings policy will be updated following the approval of the recommendations as outlined in this report. The final version of the report will be approved by the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment.

30. Housing Leeds will update the published lettings policy on leeds.gov.uk and information on the Leeds Homes website, and brief staff and partner agencies prior to implementing the changes.

31. The following changes will be introduced first:

- Permanently remove the Date of Registration and Tenant Transfer Quotas and let all properties based on housing need.
- Restrict which adult household members can be added to be rehoused on new applications
- Not accept new applications from customers who would be in Band D.
- Increase the length of time priority is awarded for from 180 days to 365 days for new priority awards and priority extension requests for applicants already in priority. Priority awards that have been made prior to the approval of the new policy will not be extended until an extension request is received.
- Change the existing homeless duty discharge direct let category so that this can be awarded as soon as the council accepts the full homeless duty, removing the 120 day period before statutory homeless customers are awarded a direct let.
- Introduce the new homeless direct let as an approved corporate objective direct let allowing offers to be made to some customers in temporary accommodation ahead of other customers when justified by extraordinary pressures on the Council.

- Stop awarding priority for households who apply for rehousing with dependent children living in high rise. Existing applicants with a priority award will continue to be allowed to bid on their current priority.
32. The following changes will be introduced on a phased basis as part of each applicant's annual review, where they are asked to update their circumstances. If they are found to be non-qualifying, their application will be cancelled and they will be given advice on their alternative options, a written decision and the right to request a review of the non-qualification decision:
- applicants who have an annual income / savings / assets over £60k.
 - applicants who haven't lived in Leeds for 2 years and don't have a connection to Leeds.
 - applicants who are currently in Band D.
33. Other opportunities to consider whether existing applicants continue to qualify include when a request for a priority award is not extended, or the customer does not request an extension, and at point of letting. If a customer does not respond to a communication about their circumstances their application will be cancelled. These changes will require changes to the housing application form held on the Leeds Homes website.
34. At present it is not possible to provide a precise timescale for the implementation of changes because the IT system is due to be upgraded in early 2025, and no changes can be made until this has been completed. The detailed implementation plan will be delegated to the Director Communities, Housing and Environment. This will outline the timescales for notifying applicants of changes to the policy, which changes will apply to current applicants, and the timetable for implementing changes.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Summary of consultation responses
- Appendix 2: Summary of Registered Provider consultation responses
- Appendix 3: Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration (EDCI) document

Background papers

- None