

Report to: HPAG
Date of Meeting: 1 September 2014
Report of : Housing Project Manager
Title: Housing Register Survey 2014

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The housing register survey was carried out in Summer 2014 as part of the Council's review of the existing Housing Nomination Policy. This was the second round of consultation as an earlier, more generalised survey giving options for change was carried out in 2013. The earlier consultation had received 490 responses and 16 attendees had attended focus groups.
- 1.2 The 2014 survey was made available on the Council website and Herts Choice Homes website and was open to all residents of Watford. The questions were drawn to reflect the aspects of the Housing Nomination Policy that were earmarked for changes. Participants were also able to comment on how the existing policy had impacted on them and how the pending amendments would impact on them subsequently.
- 1.3 This report provides an overview of the individual questions and the responses generated. The responses were analysed and the deductions interpreted broadly in line with the intended amendments.
- 1.4 There were 19 questions in all with the respondents being limited to an option of 1 out of 3 possible choice of answers for clarity. Alternatively they could skip any particular question should they be minded. The questions were not vague or general as they do relate to particular aspects of the Housing Nominations Policy.
- 1.5 The total number of respondents was 146. It is noted that this figure is comparatively low referencing the total number of residents in the borough which stands at an excess of 90,000 however it relatively reflects the diversified composition that currently exists within Watford Borough Council area.
- 1.6 The number of respondents also varied on individual questions and it is deduced that individual respondents would most likely respond on questions that have a direct impact on them.

2.0 RESULT

- 2.1 The responses broadly reflect that most are supportive of the proposed amendments and additional comments do show that they would prefer that the restrictions went further demonstrating the high demand for housing in Watford

2.2 Some respondents sought clarity on certain questions which the proposed amendments has already addressed

2.3 The questions and responses are expressed in percentages and with interpretation

Appendix

Appendix A: Outline implementation plan

3.0 SURVEY QUESTIONS, RESPONSES & INTERPRETATION

Q1. *To join, or stay on Watford's Housing Register, people should : Live in Watford now and have done so for at least 5 out of the last 6 years. There Were 144 respondents; 2 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	63.89%	92
I disagree	27.08%	39
I don't know	9.03%	13
Total		144

The above reflects a broad support for the proposal that existing and prospective applicants to the Housing Register should have resided in the Watford Borough Council area for 5 out of the last 6 years.

Q2. *Working or having relatives in Watford should not count as a 'residency connection'- a connection which makes people eligible to apply. There were 140 respondents; 6 skipped*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	50.71%	71
I disagree	41.43%	58
I don't know	7.86%	11
Total		140

The above reflects that the proportion of support for the proposal to restrict access to the register through work or having relatives in the borough outweighs the opposition to this amendment. This follows through from the previous question on eligibility through residency.

Q3. *Remove all the applicants who are in Band E(the lowest priority band who are adequately housed) but allow people over 60 who would like older person's accommodation only to remain on the Housing Register as Band E. There were 129 respondents; 17 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	48.84%	63
I disagree	41.86%	54
I don't know	9.30%	12
Total		129

Whilst support is expressed for the above proposal the relative closeness between respondents agreeing and those who disagree reflected in this data despite this being accommodation specifically for the elderly shows the high pressure on the demand for housing in Watford.

Q4. *Remove all the applicants who are in Band E (the lowest priority band who are adequately housed) but allow people who are living in a housing association property in Watford or where Watford BC would be able to nominate someone to the vacancy if they moved, to remain on the Housing Register as Band E. There were 128 respondents and 18 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	36.72%	47
I disagree	35.16%	45
I don't know	28.13%	36
Total		128

The varying response on the above question is broadly close however the preference for concession on this outweighs the opposition.

Q5. *Remove people from who own their own home from the Housing Register. There were 127 respondents; 19 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	90.55%	115
I disagree	5.51%	7
I don't know	3.94%	5
Total		127

The response agreeing to the above proposal is extremely high compared with any opposition within the respondent group.

Q6. *Remove people who have enough income or capital to buy or rent a home privately. There were 126 respondents, 20 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	61.90%	78
I disagree	28.57%	36
I don't know	9.52%	12
Total		126

The above reflects a broad support for the proposal that existing and prospective applicants who have enough income or capital to buy or rent a home privately should be excluded from the register.

Q7. *Remove people who refuse 3 properties that they have been offered (with a review period set to reapply). There were 124 respondents; 22 skipped*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	75.81%	94
I disagree	20.16%	25
I don't know	4.03%	5
Total		124

The above reflects a broad support for the proposal that existing applicants who have refused 3 offers of a properties considered to be reasonable and suitable for their needs should be excluded from the register.

Q8. *Remove people who have deliberately made their housing situation worse (with a review period set to reapply). There were 125 respondents; 21 skipped*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	77.60%	97
I disagree	13.60%	17
I don't know	8.08%	11
Total		125

The above reflects a broad support for the proposal that existing and prospective applicants who have deliberately made their housing situation worse should be excluded from the register for set period. It is supportive to note that the prospective position of Watford Borough Council to exercise restrictions on cases such as this also has the broad support of the respondents.

Q9. *People without children who have their own bedroom but are sharing a living room would no longer be counted as overcrowded. There were 125 respondents; 21 skipped*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	59.20%	74
I disagree	28.80%	36
I don't know	12.00%	15
Total		125

This reflects a broad support for the proposal with respondents in favour more than twice the number in opposition. Another reflection of the increasing demand for housing.

Q10. *Families with two same sex children where one is over 16 and there is a 7 year age gap or more would be considered to need separate bedrooms for each child. There were 126 respondents, 20 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	76.98%	97
I disagree	14.29%	18
I don't know	8.73%	11
Total		126

The above reflects the broad support of the respondents with majority agreeing to this.

Q11. *Due to the shortage of housing association homes, households where the council has a homelessness duty to find alternative accommodation may be offered private sector housing instead of social housing. There were 124 respondents; 22 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	60.48%	75
I disagree	27.42%	34
I don't know	12.10%	15
Total		124

The above reflects a broad support in the council's bid to rehouse homeless households into accommodation in the private sector. As part of the Housing Nominations Policy, a Private Sector Discharge Policy will come into operation to set out the process for this policy.

Q12. *Households where the council has a homelessness duty to find alternative accommodation will be offered private sector housing if they cannot join the Housing Register e.g. are not living in Watford now and for 5 out of the last 6 years (for those applying after the new Policy comes in). There were 121 respondents; 25 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	59.50%	72
I disagree	20.66%	25
I don't know	19.83%	24
Total		121

This follows through from the previous question further subscribing to a broad support in the council's proposal to rehouse homeless households into accommodation in the private sector.

Q13. Homeless households would be able to bid for an increased time limit of 8 weeks before the council bids for properties for them on Choice Based Lettings. There were 122 respondents; 24 skipped.

Answer Choices	Responses	
I agree	63.11%	77
I disagree	21.31%	26
I don't know	15.57%	19
Total		122

The above reflects a broad support from the respondents for the proposal with the majority in agreement.

Q14. If you have any further comments on the Housing Register or the Housing Nomination Policy, please share your views below. There were 30 respondents; 116 skipped.

In summary, the comments were broadly in support of the proposed amendments to the Housing Nomination Policy. There were additional suggestions which include

- Preference for resident working families above non-working families
- Reserving a percentage of properties for eligible working residents
- Further assistance to secure properties in the private rent sector.
- Further restrictions on homeless households to discourage homelessness being used as a quicker route into social housing
- Need to make larger family homes available within the borough
- Process to address under-occupation in social housing properties
- Prioritisation for applicants with more than 6 years waiting time

Q15. Are you? There were 112 respondents; 34 skipped

Answer Choices	Responses	
Male	30.36%	34
Female	69.64%	78
Total		112

This is gender related and indicates that a higher proportion of the respondents were females compared to the males. This is also a reflection of the current housing register that has more female household members and heads of household than males.

Q16. Which age band are you in? There were 117 respondents; 29 skipped

Answer Choices	Responses	
18-19 years	0.85%	1
20-24 years	8.55%	10
25-34 years	36.75%	43
35-44 years	23.93%	28
45-54 years	22.22%	26
55-64 years	5.13%	6
65-74 years	1.71%	2
75-79 years	0.00%	0
80+	0.85%	1
Total		117

The above age bands and the breakdown of the respondents in each band is a reflection of the existing register. As an example, the 25-34 age band represents the highest number of existing applicants on the register. The least number applicants occur from the age 55 and above which is in excess of 750 at present on the register.

Q17. Are you working, not working or retired? There were 116 respondents; 30 skipped.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Working	69.83%	81
Not working	27.59%	32
Retired	2.59%	3
Total		116

The working group had the highest number of respondents in this survey. This may explain the suggestions in favour of the working residents in the borough earlier in the survey.

Q18. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last at least 12 months? There were 115 respondents; 31 skipped

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes, limited a lot	6.96%	8
Yes, limited a little	13.04%	15
No	80.00%	92
Total		115

The composition of the responses is a fair reflection of the current register. There is provision in the policy for applicants with health problems or disability. A limited number of properties with specific disabled facilities are

reserved for eligible applicants and due diligence is observed to ensure that these properties are accessed by those with the identified needs.

Q19 *To which of these groups do you consider you belong? There were 112 respondents, 34 skipped.*

Answer Choices	Responses	
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/ British	62.50%	70
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1.79%	2
Irish	0.89%	1
Any other white background	6.25%	7
Caribbean	5.36%	6
African	5.36%	6
Any other Black background	1.79%	2
White & Black Caribbean	1.79%	2
White & Black African	0.89%	1
White & Asian	0.89%	1
Any other mixed / multiple ethnic background	1.79%	2
Pakistani	2.68%	3
Bangladeshi	1.79%	2
Chinese	0.00%	0
Any other Asian background	1.79%	2
Arab	2.68%	3
Other ethnic group	0.89%	1
Total		112

This is another reflection of the relative population of the individual groups on the current register and is similar to the records from the most recent census conducted in the borough.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 The above survey has clearly set out the plan of the Watford Borough Council to make amendments to the current Housing Nomination Policy and the areas where these are intended.

4.2 It is noted that the sample size is marginal, 146 in total from a borough population in excess of 90,000 based on the recent census of 2011. However further analysis of the characteristics of the sample as shown in the questions establishes the sample size as an effective representation of the composition of the current register and the borough as a whole.

4.3 It should also be noted that effective representative surveys average a sample size of 0.005% of the total population. The above survey represents 0.001% which falls within an acceptable statistical margin considering the current the population of Watford.

- 4.4 The responses generated have emphasised the need for Watford Borough Council to make urgent changes in the way the Housing Register operates its service.
- 4.5 While it is acknowledged that the changes will raise the eligibility requirement and inevitably reduce the number of applicants on the register, the reduction in number will make way for the delivery of a service that is more representative, relevant, effective and efficient.
- 4.6 There was broad mention and corresponding acceptance that access on to the register should be restricted and made more favourable to the residents of the borough that meet the eligibility criteria.
- 4.7 There was mention of further provision for working residents rather than the non-working residents in the borough that has not being taken forward by the council and an emphasis on active steps that should be taken to discourage reliance on the homelessness as a quicker route into social housing which is very much the focus of the Policy.
- 4.8 The above establishes a broad support for the proposed amendments.

APPENDIX A

Following the broad support expressed in the consultation survey, a prospective outline of the implementation plan is as below. The start and end dates are estimates as defined and may be subject to change in the course of implementation.

Outline implementation plan

Task	Estimated Start Date	Estimated End Date	Priority	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software changes and testing, tailoring an online pre-assessment model which will advise people after a few questions if they are unlikely to be able to register and what their options are. 	Sep-14	Jan-15	High	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring applicants to re-register so that we can assess them against the new criteria. This will require additional support in the CSC. 	Feb-15	Mar-15	High	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying out staff and partner agency training to ensure that applicants are correctly assessed and supported 	Nov-14	Feb-15	High	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant public communications work to explain the policy but also to bolster the supply of information on alternative housing options 	Oct-14	Dec-14	High	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and approval of our Private Sector Discharge Policy to enable us to meet our homelessness duty to people who can no longer register for social housing (and potentially other homeless cases where suitable private sector property is available). 	Oct-14	Feb-15	High	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of supporting procedures in order to implement the Policies and monitoring systems for regular reporting and action as required 	Sep-14	Apr-15	High	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-registered applications being held in a pending system until implementation date 	Jan-15	Mar-15	High	