

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee –
10 March 2021

Subject: Housing Allocations Policy Review

Report of: Strategic Director, Growth & Development

Summary

This report describes the work undertaken to deliver the new social housing allocations scheme on time despite Covid-19 pressures. While noting that the new scheme has not yet been in operation long enough for impact to be assessed, the current housing register position is consistent with the new scheme working as intended.

Recommendations

The Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee is invited to

1. Comment on the report.
 2. Note that the ability to draw any reasonable conclusions about the effectiveness of the new scheme from the 12-month interim evaluation due at the start of 2022 will be affected by the continuing pandemic and the special measures put in place for the most vulnerable.
 3. Note that the effectiveness of the new scheme will best be evaluated by the planned evaluation after 24 months, at the start of 2023.
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Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

n/a

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Provide advice and information around other housing options where this may be appropriate - this includes affordable home ownership and the private rented sector.

A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	n/a
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Ensuring the Policy assists with balancing communities and encouraging potential in partnership with RP partners, using Local Letting Policy where necessary.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Encouraging RP partners to reduce CO2 emissions and reduce their use of plastics will contribute to a low carbon city as well as zero carbon social homes built. Discussing climate change conversations with tenants of social housing supporting them in adopting a low carbon lifestyle.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Ensuring people have a settled home that's right for them this will enable them to flourish and contribute within the city.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Manchester City Council Part VI Allocations Scheme 2011

- Manchester City Council Part VI Scheme for the Allocation of Social Housing 2020
- Housing Act 1996
- Homelessness Code of Guidance
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessnesscode-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>
- Allocations Code of Guidance
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/allocation-of-accommodationguidance-for-local-housing-authorities-in-england>
- Update on Homelessness and Housing, Neighbourhoods and the Environment Scrutiny Committee Report – Wednesday 17th July 2019
- Report on Housing Allocations Policy Review, Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee – 6th November 2019, Executive – 13th November 2019

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The report to Neighbourhood and Environment Scrutiny Committee November 2019 and to the Executive Committee in November 2019 described how Manchester's current Housing Allocations Scheme had remained fundamentally the same since 2011.
- 1.2 The report provided the context and evidence as to why the Allocations Scheme needed to be reviewed, looking at how, for several years, the turnover of social housing had been reducing while demand had steadily increased. It described engagement with stakeholders to develop proposals while ensuring that the proposals would not have a disproportionate effect on applicants in the protected characteristic groups.
- 1.3 The objectives in undertaking the review of the scheme were that it:
 - Continues to accord with legislation and statutory guidance
 - Provides the means of managing the allocation of a scarce resource (social housing) in a fair and equitable manner assisting those in most need
 - Is transparent and easy to understand
 - Takes into account the need to manage neighbourhoods
 - Takes into account the Homelessness Reduction Act, welfare reforms and the city's Homelessness Strategy
 - Will assist the city deliver its wider commitments in the City Strategy ("Our Manchester") and the Housing Strategy
 - Continues to comply with local authority equality duties
 - Has no unintended adverse impact on other housing practice
- 1.4 The report described how all our Manchester Move partners had been involved in developing the scheme and had agreed to the proposals via the formal consultation. Other key partners such as Manchester Women's Aid, Crisis and Shelter were also included in the consultation. Responses were supportive of the proposed changes.
- 1.5 The review received a lot of media coverage, including on social media. A public exercise, in the form of an online survey, was undertaken during July and August 2019. The majority of responses were very supportive of the proposed changes.
- 1.6 The new Allocations Scheme was approved by the Executive at the November 2019 meeting.
- 1.7 This report provides an update on the process that followed. It describes how partners have worked extremely hard during a most challenging time to ensure the new allocations scheme went into operation without any delay. It also provides a very brief update on the current Manchester Housing Register, and notes that the full effect of the new Allocations Scheme will not be known for some months yet.

- 1.8 As previously agreed, an interim evaluation of the effectiveness of the new allocations scheme will be carried out at the end of this year after the new scheme has been in operation for 12 months, when any unexpected but significant effects can be identified and dealt with. A more informed evaluation of its effectiveness will be carried out after two years (starting November 2022) when the full effects will be more apparent.

2.0 Timetable

- 2.1 The original implementation timetable had for the new scheme to take effect by the end of September 2020.
- 2.2 By January 2020 it was clear that the timetable needed to change in order to allow more time for training and reregistration to take place over the summer period, and also to allow Manchester Move landlords to contact applicants who needed to provide more information or to update their application. Executive Members were kept informed. A new timetable was agreed in February 2020, with an expectation of the new scheme taking effect on 3rd November.
- 2.3 The pandemic then necessitated a robust and objective reconsideration of the timetable during the summer period. Everyone worked extremely hard to keep to the 3 November date despite the pressures and challenges of the pandemic.

3.0 Revising the Manchester Move IT system

- 3.1 Over the first quarter of 2020 the Manchester Move IT team (two people) worked with the council and partners to map out the IT implications of the new scheme and with the IT provider to put the required system changes in place.
- 3.2 Once the system changes had been made, critical systems testing took place over the following few weeks. A council officer was remotely embedded with the Manchester Move IT team to support this work.
- 3.3 The systems testing worked very well. It brought to light some unexpected IT issues that were addressed before the system was tested again and found to be working well with no more significant issues to be addressed.

4.0 Training

- 4.1 Once the system was in place and shown to be working well, the training of Manchester Move users was put in place. This was a huge task and was delivered with diligence against the backdrop of the developing pandemic. The original plans for face to face training had to be scrapped and new training tools and methods had to be developed at very short notice.
- 4.2 The training was delivered by the same three people who had managed the IT system changes. In response to training remotely, extra emphasis was placed

on trainees' feedback and trainers' debriefing after every training session, to ensure the quality and consistency of the training.

- 4.3 The training was delivered in different stages, with the Manchester Move "superusers" trained first, during two weeks in July. Over this period, 58 superusers attended from Manchester Move partners and from the council's homeless service.
- 4.4 The second phase of the training was for the superusers to cascade training to their colleagues ahead of the new versions of the Manchester Move online forms going live on 3rd August. Superusers were sent a training materials pack that included 2 presentations (a half day course and a full day course), timed session plans for both courses and exercises to be completed by participants in the training. This ensured that all trainees were given the same information, which helps to ensure consistency when they are providing support to applicants.
- 4.5 During this phase of the training, the three lead officers encouraged contact from the superusers if they had any questions or needed support.
- 4.6 The third phase of the training programme, from mid-September to the end of October, was the training of external organisations and other services who are not involved in the day-to-day management of rehousing cases, but who often deal with rehousing queries. This included commissioned supported housing accommodation providers, MCC Libraries, homelessness charities, tenants' groups and NHS staff. Over 110 people were trained, of whom 71 were from commissioned supported housing providers.
- 4.7 The overwhelming response to the training was very positive. Trainees and partner organisations were especially thankful to the three officers who made such a huge effort throughout the summer and autumn, first to amend the training programme at very short notice, and then to deliver it so successfully despite the pandemic.

5.0 Communications

- 5.1 This workstream benefitted from the strong interest and leading role of Executive Members, with expert support and contribution from the Communications team.
- 5.2 Communication of the changes to the scheme and how they would affect both current and new applicants was a major contribution to the successful launch of the new scheme.
- 5.3 Key to managing this was sharing information and explanation about why the scheme needed to change and how it was changing. To be as effective as possible, this communication needed to take different forms for different stakeholders.
- 5.4 Stakeholder audiences included:

- Rehousing applicants (people with Manchester Move applications)
- Manchester Move partner landlords
- External organisations, e.g. Shelter, The Pankhurst Trust / Manchester Women's Aid, Saheli, CAB, MACC, etc. – all were happy to share information as appropriate
- Over 60 organisations in the Voluntary and Community Services directory – again, all were happy to share information as appropriate
- MCC service areas
- MPs' offices
- The GMCA – for sharing with the other 9 Greater Manchester districts
- Press and other media

5.5 Communication methods used included:

- Member briefings
- Briefing papers and guidance notes for Manchester Move partners
- Development and distribution of an FAQs paper
- Voiceover PowerPoint presentations
- Producing a scheme summary in different versions
- Updating and adding new information on the Council's website, on the Manchester Move website and on external organisations' websites
- Briefing papers for other council service areas
- Press releases and social media messaging
- Translations of key messages into the top 10 languages used across Manchester
- Online presentations, briefings and Q&A sessions

5.6 Expectations were that the council and the Manchester Move partners would need to deal with a substantially larger than normal number of enquiries from applicants whose priority was changing.

5.7 In the event, there were fewer enquiries than expected due to the extensive communications work and due to all the efforts made by Manchester Move partners in migrating applications, as described in the next section.

6.0 Migration of applications

6.1 There was a strong commitment to minimise the need for applicants to manage moving their information over to the new scheme. As far as it was possible to do so, current applications were carried over into the new scheme and placed into the relevant new scheme band. For the greater part this process was automated, but there was a significant period of personal contact with applicants whose information needed updating in order that we could be confident that their application would be placed in the correct band. This work was undertaken by the Manchester Move partners in a very sensitive and caring manner to avoid people becoming unduly anxious about their application.

- 6.2 782 applicants in the priority bands with missing or out of date information were contacted directly by the Manchester Move partners handling their applications to support them to update their information. A considerable amount of work was then undertaken to look at individual applications and identify any applicants who had priority (bands 1-3) under the old scheme but who might not qualify under the new scheme.
- 6.3 As stated at the November 2019 Executive meeting, data did not exist to enable officers to be definitive about the number affected in this way, but it was estimated at a maximum of 500 from the priority bands, although it was anticipated that most would still qualify once additional information had been submitted for their applications. In the event, the work to support applicants to update their information, followed by detailed work to reassess applications in this category, meant that the actual number no longer qualifying was only 151. Additionally, in recognition of the time spent in priority under the old scheme, Executive Members agreed that these applicants will be offered a “credit” of the length of time they had been on the housing register if they reapply at the point they qualify. By offering this credit, the council has ensured that the scheme rules are being transparently and consistently applied but it is also being sensitive to the rehousing needs of these applicants. With their agreement, these applicants’ details are being retained to facilitate a quick and easy reapplication at the point they qualify.
- 6.4 From August 3rd, new applicants were presented with the new application form with questions that relate to the new policy and were given bands under the new scheme rules in readiness for the November 3rd change over. During these three months, new applicants were accruing time on the register (their award dates) but were not yet allowed to place bids. This kind of arrangement is normal when allocations schemes are in transition and is necessary to avoid having two sets of rules operating simultaneously, effectively requiring two housing registers to be maintained. Importantly, these new applicants were not adversely affected because they would have been very low down shortlists and have no real chance of an offer. Exceptions were made for those new applicants who might have had even a small chance of an offer because they were in band 1 or they wanted non-family or sheltered accommodation. These exceptional cases were handled manually by the Manchester Move partners.
- 6.5 September and October saw the migration of applications across to the new scheme. The migration of applications from the old scheme to the new one was handled very sensitively and very professionally by the Manchester Move member organisations, minimising the need to deal with follow up enquiries and questions.
- 6.6 These actions ensured that all priority applicants (bands 1-3) were in the correct band when the new system went live on 3rd November.
- 6.7 Applications in the non-priority bands (bands 4 and 5) have had their annual review brought forward to ensure that all applications will have been reassessed under the new scheme by the end of March 2021.

7.0 Impact of pandemic

- 7.1 In response to the pandemic, housing partners agreed to backdate vulnerable applicants in band 1 to move them up the queues for homes. Band 1 lets are largely to facilitate downsizing and in response to medical need, domestic violence/abuse and risk to life. At the same time, national moves to help people off the streets meant there was a need to assist move on from temporary and supported accommodation in order to make places available for those who needed them. Hence, move on from supported or temporary accommodation (old bands 2 & 3, and new band 2) was made a high priority in order to contribute to protecting residents and protecting the NHS.
- 7.2 These actions were managed very closely and very successfully by the Manchester Move partners, even while they were making the transition to the new allocations scheme.
- 7.3 Actions in response to the pandemic have been essential and welcomed. They will have to continue until the most serious period of the pandemic is over. This means that the longer-term effect of the new scheme rules on improving allocations to those in greatest need will not start to become clear for some months yet.

8.0 Current position

- 8.1 At this stage it is too early to draw any firm conclusions about how well the new scheme is contributing to help manage access to social homes for those in greatest need. Most homes let during November, December and January were advertised before the scheme changed, and accordingly were let to the old rules. Properties advertised since 3rd November are only just beginning to be let.
- 8.2 The new scheme looks only at housing need. This was a decision that Members took to assist with move on from temporary accommodation in order to help some of those in greatest need have a chance of a social home. Consequently, most homeless applicants who had been struggling in band 3 are now in band 2 and have a much better chance of being rehoused. Because many had been in the reasonable preference categories for some time yet were unable to make successful bids, they have relatively long award dates (also known as “queue dates”) and so are now at the top of shortlists for homes. This means that the early impact of the new scheme is that many more than usual homeless applicants will be at the top of shortlists for properties until the historical band 3 “backlog” has worked through the system. It is likely that this will take some months to clear and, coupled with essential pandemic responses, means that the true effects of the new scheme rules will not begin to be evident until the autumn or later.
- 8.3 The allocations scheme is the method by which the council tries to ensure that the scarce resource (social housing) is made available to those who need it most. In other words, the scheme manages one aspect of the supply of social homes.

8.4 The scheme also tries to help manage expectations and the demand for social homes. The new scheme does this in three ways. First, by having the minimum two years continuous residency requirement, as recommended by government. Secondly, by restricting bids for homes to applicants from the priority bands other than for retirement accommodation or non-family homes. Third, and perhaps most importantly, by offering advice and housing options guidance as part of the process to apply to join the housing register.

8.5 Table 1 shows the Manchester Housing Register at the end of January 2021, with table 2 for comparison as at the end of December 2019.

Table 1: Manchester Housing Register as at end January 2021

	Bedrooms												totals	
	1		2		3		4		5		6+			
band	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%
1	443	2.7	176	1.1	86	0.5	105	0.7	21	0.1	17	0.1	848	5.3
2	1452	9.0	2025	12.6	766	4.7	364	2.3	96	0.6	10	0.1	4713	29.2
3	242	1.5	147	0.9	1022	6.3	346	2.1	11	0.1	0	0.0	1768	11.0
bands 1-3	2137	13.2	2348	14.6	1874	11.6	815	5.1	128	0.8	27	0.2	7329	45.4
4	4605	28.5	2517	15.6	1253	7.8	154	1.0	22	0.1	3	0.0	8554	53.0
5	180	1.1	43	0.3	22	0.1	7	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	252	1.6
bands 4+5	4785	29.7	2560	15.9	1275	7.9	161	1.0	22	0.1	3	0.0	8806	54.6
totals	6922	42.9	4908	30.4	3149	19.5	976	6.0	150	0.9	30	0.2	16135	100.0

Table 2: Manchester Housing Register as at end December 2019

	Bedrooms												totals	
	1		2		3		4		5		6+			
band	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%
1	362	2.5	157	1.1	49	0.3	57	0.4	19	0.1	18	0.1	662	4.5
2	401	2.7	713	4.9	833	5.7	310	2.1	48	0.3	7	0.0	2312	15.8
3	1100	7.5	1,128	7.7	847	5.8	316	2.2	49	0.3	7	0.0	3447	23.6
bands 1-3	1863	12.7	1998	13.7	1729	11.8	683	4.7	116	0.7	32	0.1	6421	44.0
4	862	5.9	763	5.2	410	2.8	38	0.3	3	0.0	1	0.0	2077	14.2
5	2075	14.2	1188	8.1	592	4.1	84	0.6	3	0.0	1	0.0	3943	27.0
6	1084	7.5	659	4.5	319	2.2	74	0.5	14	0.1	1	0.0	2151	14.7
bands 4-6	4021	27.6	2610	17.8	1321	9.1	196	1.4	20	0.1	3	0.0	8171	56.0
totals	5884	30.3	4608	31.5	3050	20.9	879	6.1	136	0.8	35	0.1	14592	100.0

- 8.6 Of note is the fact that demand continues to increase. In just over a year the total number on the register increased by over 1500. More importantly, the number of applicants in priority bands increased by over 900 despite the special pandemic measures put in place to accommodate higher numbers from the priority groups. Not only has the number in priority increased, but the percentage of the register in priority has increased from 44% to 45.4%.
- 8.7 New band 2, as expected, is more than double the size of the old band 2. While this means there is increased competition in band 2 it also means that everyone in the band will have a chance of being rehoused at some point, unlike those in old band 3 who had very little chance.
- 8.8 Over 2,000 applicants in priority bands (13.2% of the whole register and 29% of applicants in priority) need one bedroom homes.
- 8.9 The numbers of applicants who need larger homes is increasing. At the end of 2019, 831 households in priority bands needed a home with four or more bedrooms. At the end of January 2012 that had increased to 970. The turnover of larger homes is very low and most of these households will never be made an offer of a social home. The new allocations scheme helps to manage expectations about securing larger homes by describing what moving groups are permitted. In general terms this means that adult children, unless they are carers or have always lived with the household, are not included. This helps people to understand that they have a far better chance of getting a social home if adult children can make their own arrangements, making smaller homes a real option for smaller households.
- 8.10 When the annual review of applications in the lower bands (bands 4 and 5) is completed, it is likely that a number of applicants not in housing need will be found not to qualify and will be removed from the housing register. As with the assessment of applications in the priority bands, it is not possible to estimate how many applicants might be affected in this way. But it is important to note that these are applicants not in housing need and who would have very little chance ever of making a successful bid. It is also important to note that, although this will reduce the total number of applications on the housing register, it will not affect the number in the priority bands 1-3 and will have no effect on lets.
- 8.11 The average number of bids received for each property advertised on Manchester Move now ranges from 203 bids for one bedroom homes up to 648 for three bedroom homes. The average number of bids across all sizes is around 365.
- 8.12 There would normally be around 1200 homes let in a 6 month period. The pandemic badly affected turnover and lets during April-June when just 300 properties were let. Once restrictions had been eased, turnover and lets recovered to normal and total lets for the 6 month period reached 916. See tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Manchester Move lets April-June 2020 by band

band	no	%
1	405	44
2	266	29
3	179	20
4	43	5
5	19	2
6	4	1
Total	916	100

Table 4: Manchester Move lets April-June 2020 by property type

bedrooms	no	%	to band1	%
1	247	27	143	58
1 (55+)	118	13	32	27
2 non family	94	10	25	27
2 family	231	25	109	47
3 family	183	20	82	45
3 parlour	17	2	8	47
3 non family	4	0.5	0	0
4 family	17	2	3	18
4 parlour	4	0.5	2	50
5 family	1	0.1	1	100
Totals	916	100	405	44

9.0 Conclusions

- 9.1 Everyone involved worked extremely hard and with enormous commitment to ensure the new allocations scheme was delivered on time against all the extra pressures of the pandemic.
- 9.2 Although the pandemic response coupled with timing means it is far too early to say with certainty that the new scheme is having the desired effect of helping those in greatest need secure a social home, there is some evidence that it is doing so and there is no evidence to the contrary. The planned evaluation of the scheme at the start of 2023, after 24 months, will provide the best assessment. The findings of the planned interim evaluation at the start of 2022, after 12 months, while useful, unavoidably will be compromised by the continuing pandemic responses to house the most vulnerable.