

APPENDIX 3

RESPONSES TO THE WEBSITE SURVEY IN REGARD TO THE REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME (ALLOCATIONS POLICY)

This appendix sets out the feedback to the main consultation questions contained within the website survey which was live from 13 November 2023 to 22 December 2023.

298 responses were received including nine organisations.

97% of those that responded stated they lived in Harlow, and 43% stated they are Council tenants.

35% of those that responded stated they are on the Housing Needs Register with 57% in Band 3 and 31% Band 2, 9% Band 4.

Summary of the responses below:

We want to ensure that local homes are let to genuinely local people and want to strengthen our policy to ensure this happens in all cases.

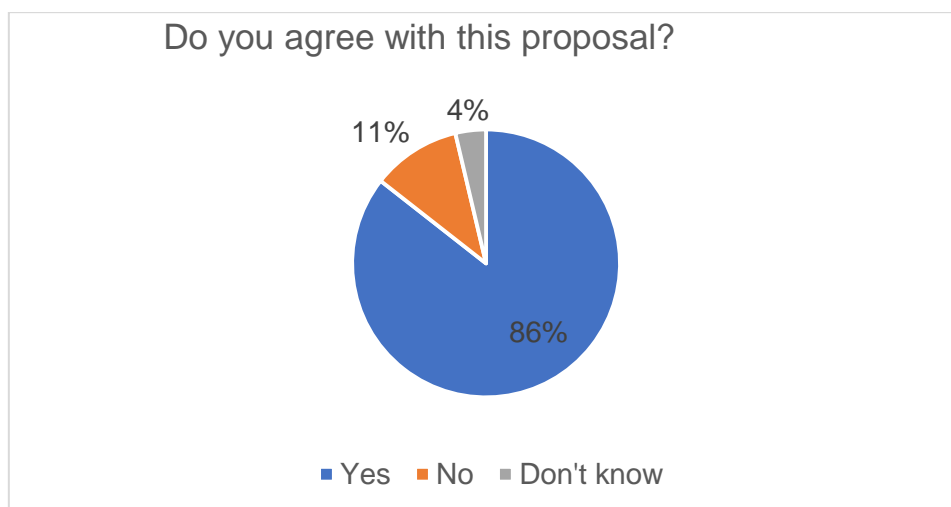
Proposal 1 – Local connection

We propose that homes will only be let to those who have lived in Harlow for a significant period. Currently there is a 5-year residency requirement. However, we want to strengthen this and are considering either a 7-year requirement or a 10-year requirement. This would bring Harlow's policy in line with some other surrounding areas such as Epping and Basildon whose current criteria is 7 years.

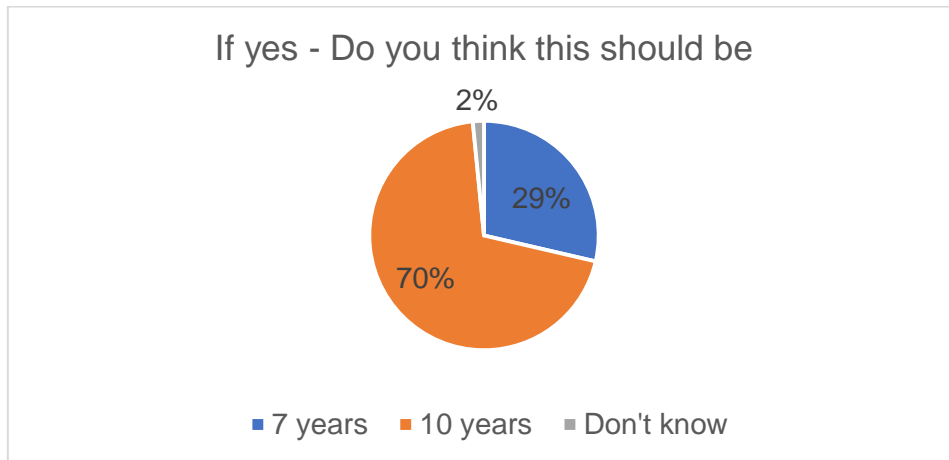
Local connection through family connection or employment will no longer be valid (except in very exceptional circumstances).

We are also considering giving extra priority (such as backdating applications by 12 months) to those who were born in Harlow and still live here.

- The majority of all respondents (86%) agreed with this proposal, significantly less than a quarter (11%) of respondents did not agree with even less (4%) Don't know.



- The majority of all respondents (70%) agreed with 10-year proposal, over a quarter agreed with (29%) 7 years proposal and (2%) Don't know.



Proposal 2 - Removal of Band 4

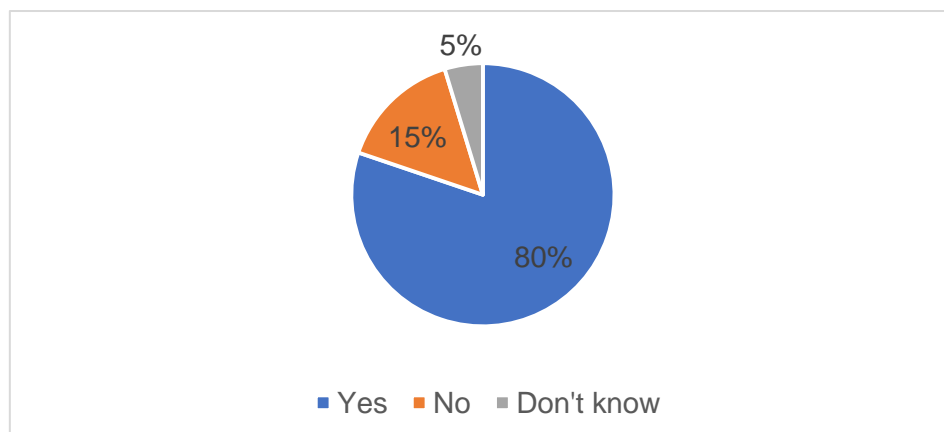
The Housing Needs Register is currently open to every resident to apply, regardless of housing need. Those who apply but have no actual housing need are placed in Band 4. The Council rarely allocates homes to people in Band 4. In fact, during 2022/23, no lettings were made to people in this band, apart from lettings to dedicated older person housing schemes (over 65 years)

We believe that there is no value in registering applicants when there are no prospects of rehousing. We would rather have an honest conversation with people at the point they apply and signpost them to better, more realistic housing options.

The proposal is to remove Band 4 from the Housing Needs Register. Applicants will be reassessed but if they have no housing need and no prospects of rehousing, they will no longer be eligible.

For older people with a local connection to Harlow, who want to move into age restricted supported accommodation, we will continue to accept them onto the Housing Needs Register, because these properties are sometimes in low demand.

- The majority of all respondents (80%) agreed with this proposal, significantly less than a quarter (15%) of respondents did not agree with even less (5%) Don't know.



Proposal 3 – Maximum income threshold

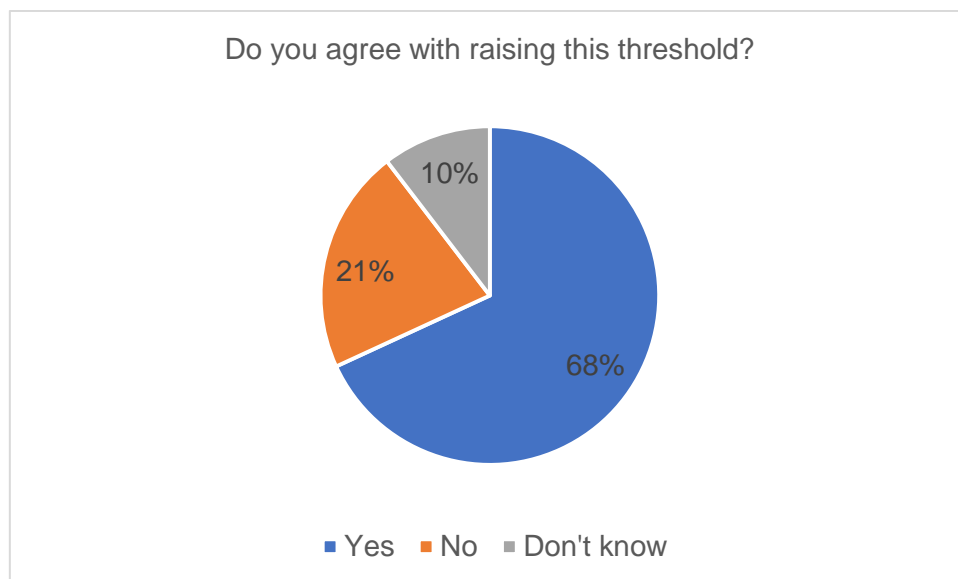
Currently households who have a household income of over £50k per year, are excluded from joining the Housing Needs Register on the basis that they have the financial resources to find alternative forms of accommodation in the private sector, through renting or shared ownership. This has been in our policy since 2013.

However, we find that even applicants earning over this amount struggle to find homes locally and have to move out Harlow.

We have been exploring whether to set different income thresholds for different household sizes which reflects their ability to seek a home in the private sector appropriate to the number of bedrooms they need.

The proposal is, that we increase the thresholds so those that have an income of over £50K per year and to explore further income thresholds for the size of the property required to access the Housing Needs Register.

- The majority of all respondents (68%) agreed with this proposal, nearly a quarter (21%) of respondents did not agree with less (10%) Don't know.

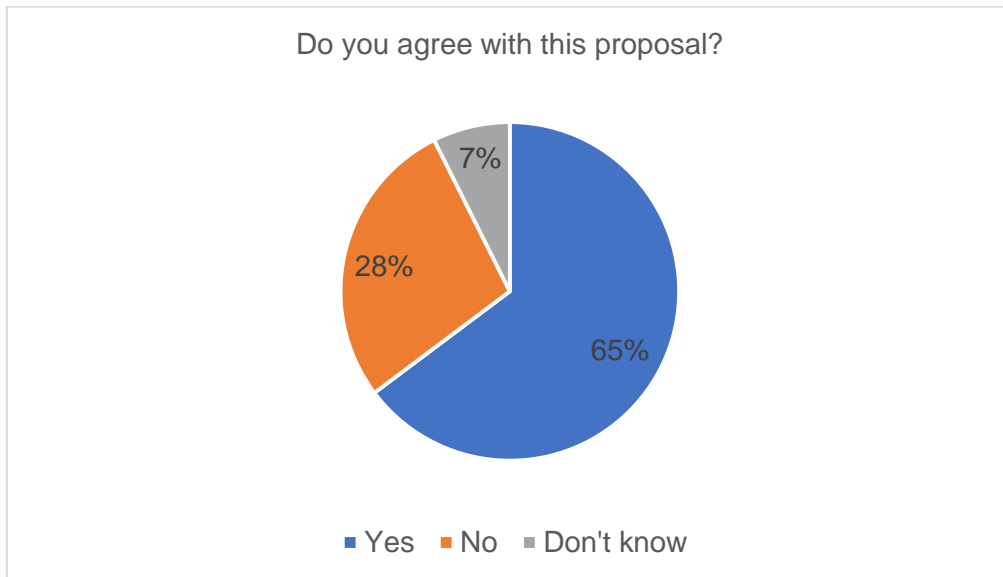


Proposal 4 – Managing Refusals

We try to give housing register applicants as much choice as possible over the home they choose for themselves and their families. However, there is a severe shortage of homes in Harlow, and we need to make sure that people are realistic about their housing choices. People can bid for up to three homes each bidding cycle. However, what we are finding is that people refuse offers of accommodation even on a home they have selected. We need to manage this as it delays allocation, which results in homes standing empty for longer, with no rental income being received.

The proposal is to retain the ability to bid for up to three homes each cycle, but to introduce stricter penalties for people who refuse reasonable offers of accommodation. This could include being suspended from the register for 12 months, unable to bid.

- The majority of all respondents (65%) agreed with this proposal, over a quarter (28%) of respondents did not agree with less (7%) Don't know.



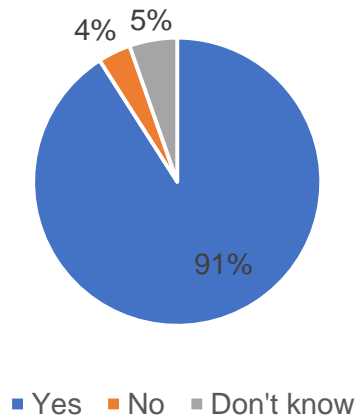
Proposal 5 – Letting adapted homes.

Due to the shortage of adapted properties; these are properties that may not originally have been designed for people with a disability or mobility need but have since been altered to accommodate these requirements. So, when these become available for letting, it is sensible to make sure they are offered to housing register applicants who have a need for the type of adaptations the home already has.

We are proposing to re-look at the categories we have for adapted properties. This will mean that homes can be assessed in a more detailed way and then matched with people with the specific need for that type of adaptation. This will mean that less work will be required either to change some existing adaptations, or to add more – making better use of what we have.

- The majority of all respondents (91%) agreed with this proposal, significantly low number (4%) of respondents did not agree with a similar number (5%) Don't know.

Do you agree that this will help to ensure homes with adaptations will be more closely matched to the needs of the housing applicant?



Proposal 6 – Nominations for agencies

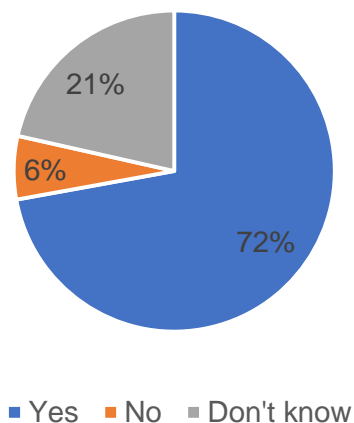
Many years ago, the Council introduced a “quota” scheme which effectively gave several organisations across Harlow, nomination rights for priority. For example, the organisation could nominate applicants who they are working with, for additional priority on our Housing Needs Register, of up to a maximum number of nominations per annum. The reason is to make available supported housing for those that most need it.

This has not been reviewed for some time, with some of the organisations no longer being active in Harlow, and some providing nominations that conflict with the Councils own managing of supply and demand.

We propose to review the Quota Scheme, with a view to introducing a different scheme or arrangement that manages move on in certain temporary/supported accommodation schemes and is more targeted to certain client groups. We will also consider manging these moves on a case-by-case basis.

- The majority of all respondents (72%) agreed with this proposal, significantly low number (6%) of respondents did not agree with nearly a quarter (21%) Don't know.

Do you agree with this need to review these quota arrangements?



Other minor changes

We are also looking at several other criteria and policy changes including:

- Updating our approach to domestic abuse
- Updating our approach to assisting those with a military background
- The priority given to households with children living in flats.
- Improving definitions in some areas so officers can apply the policy more robustly (eg where applicants have deliberately worsened their circumstances to achieve priority, exclusions for ASB and other areas)
- Reviewing the definitions of overcrowding, in line with best practice
- Ensuring that those placed in temporary accommodation by other Councils do not have access to local housing over and above Harlow residents.

The majority of all respondents (63%) agreed they would like to see other changes, however no proposals for change were identified, nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents (23%) did not consider other changes and (14%) Don't know.

