

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Garage Allocation Policy</b>
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<b>Department</b>	Housing
<b>Exempt?</b>	No

**Purpose of report:**

**To resolve**

**Synopsis of report:**

**The Council has a stock of lock up garages which are let on weekly paid licences. Originally let with Council tenancies they are now in lower demand and are let to applicants on a waiting list. An Allocation Policy is required to ensure that appropriate preference is given to local residents**

**Recommendation(s):**

**To approve the Garage Allocation Policy**

**1. Context and background of report**

1.1 The Council owns and manages 1214 lock up garages which were built as part of the social housing stock. Initially garages were let as part of the residential tenancy but as most of them are not adjacent to the property but in blocks and had a separate charge many tenants declined to take the garages leading to them being available to the wider community.

**2. Report**

2.1 A report was brought to this committee in June 2023 outlining the need for a Garage Allocation Policy and requesting approval for a consultation with residents on the proposed policy.

2.2 Council owned garages can be rented by non-Council tenants. In 2012 the Council successfully applied for a direction under section 74(3)(d) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to disapply the garages from the HRA in favour of the General Fund as less than 50% of garages were let to Council tenants (many properties having been sold under the Right to Buy with the owner retaining the garage but not on a residential tenancy). This has the benefit of allowing the net income from the garages to be kept by the General Fund whilst the ownership of the land and properties remains with the HRA.

2.3 Most Council garages are not large enough to accommodate modern vehicles and the cost cannot be covered by benefits unless the garage is physically integral to the property, so with a current rent of £1400 per week they are not affordable for most tenants who are in receipt of HB or Universal credit.

- 2.4 In order to ensure that preference is still given to Council tenants or people occupying the homes for which they were originally built a Garage Allocation Policy is required. The priority scheme within the draft policy at Appendix 1 has been in operation for at least 20 years but a formal policy has not been approved by Committee within this time.
- 2.5 The policy has never been challenged but were this to occur it could only be evidenced as historical practice.
- 2.6 Council garages will be allocated with the following priorities:
- **Priority 1-** Council tenants in the properties for which the garages were initially built with a disability or age requiring a garage in close proximity.
  - **Priority 2-** Council tenants in the properties for which the garages were initially built.
  - **Priority 3-** Non-Council Tenants within the local area
  - **Priority 4-** Other applicants
- 2.7 The terms and condition of the Garage License include:
1. A garage must only be used for the garaging of a taxed, insured, and roadworthy domestic vehicle.
  2. Garages are not suitable for storage of any other items and must not be used for any criminal or illegal purpose.
  3. Garages should not be let for the purpose of a business that will interfere with residents.
  4. No vehicle repairs or antisocial activities may be carried out within the garage area.
  5. Garages cannot be sub-let.
  6. The Council will not be held liable in respect of loss of or damage to any property brought onto any garage premises.
  7. Garage rent is payable in advance.
  8. If an applicant has an outstanding debt to the Council their application will be deferred, and no offers will be made until they have cleared the outstanding debt. This includes debts which have been passed to a collection agency due to non-payment.
  9. If rent is not paid the garage will be repossessed and a charge will be made for the lock change and clearance of any items.
  10. The Council's preferred method of payment is Direct Debit
- 2.8 A consultation on the policy was opened for 4 weeks on the Council's website with one response being received. The consultee suggested that there should be an application fee which could be discounted off the initial rent if the applicant took a garage to avoid timewasters. It is felt that whilst this could generate income it would not be reasonable at this time as the wait for some garage blocks is lengthy and others have several voids so the fee could act as a deterrent. There was also a suggestion that garages should never be let to people from out of the borough as it should be a service for residents, as category 4 will only ever be used if there is no Runnymede resident, and it is believed that income should be generated rather than leaving garages empty. An annual reregistration was also recommended, which is being introduced when the garage allocations are transferred to our NEC system following the implementation of the new residential allocations module. Information on availability was requested and we intend to advertise garages on our website where there is no applicant once the migration is made to the NEC system.

### **3. Policy framework implications**

- 3.1 The garage Strategy 2022 – 2024 identifies two key objectives for the garage portfolio, this policy will ensure that if the garage estate decreases HRA tenants and local residents will retain priority for allocation of available units.
1. Optimising Income and Efficiencies – by ensuring the existing stock is delivering the greatest revenue return to the authority
  2. New Council owned homes – as some sites will be identified for residential development

### **4 Resource implications**

- 4.1 This policy enables the garages to be let to all applicants, maintaining the income stream but with preference for local residents.

### **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 It is good practice for local authorities to adopt policies to set out how they will deal with certain situations. A policy provides a framework against which a decision will be made. A local authority clearly can depart from a policy if there are valid reasons for doing so.

### **6. Equality implications**

- 6.1 Preference will be given to local residents ensuring that elderly, disabled or vulnerable people will be prioritised for a garage near to their property. As the garages are on a weekly agreement, if a garage is required for a local resident an occupant with a lower priority under the policy will be requested to relocate within a reasonable timescale.

### **7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 This policy ensures that preference will be given to local residents reducing the level of street parking.

### **8. Timetable for Implementation**

- 8.1 The Policy will be implemented immediately on approval.

### **9. Conclusions**

- 9.1 Members are asked to approve the Garage Allocation Policy

### **10. Background papers**

Garage Allocation Policy Consultation [Report](#) to Housing Committee June 2023

### **11. Appendices**

- Garage Allocation Policy