Consultation on proposed changes to Runnymede Borough Council’s housing Allocations Scheme.

January 2021
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Introduction & Background

Social housing is provided by Councils and Housing Associations (Registered Providers). It is of enormous importance because it provides a safe and stable home for those people who need it. Runnymede Council is committed to building properties and supporting the development of new social homes, however with over 1,000 households on our Housing Register and approximately 200 properties to let each year, the demand for housing will continue to be greater than available supply.

The Housing Allocations Scheme sets out who is eligible for social housing in accordance with legislation and who qualifies to be considered for it in Runnymede. It explains the procedure for joining the Housing Register, by completing an online application form and providing supporting documents. It details how individuals’ needs will be assessed and what relative priority their application will be given. The current Allocations Scheme can be viewed here.

Runnymede’s current Allocations Scheme was adopted in 2017 and needs to be updated to reflect changes to legislation and statutory guidance. Alongside, the increasing demand for social housing, this provides an opportunity to review the existing scheme. To ensure that current and future social housing is allocated to those in the greatest housing need, we are consulting on the proposed changes to our Allocations Scheme.

Your views are important

This document explains the proposed changes for consideration within the new scheme.

Please give your opinion on the proposed changes by taking part in the consultation. A short survey is available here and should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

If you do not have access to the internet or need any other help with the consultation, please contact the housing solutions team on 01932 838383 or by email homelessconsultation@runnymede.gov.uk

Please note that we will not discuss individual applications as part of the consultation process. Should you wish to discuss your housing application, you can call the housing solutions team on 01932 838383 or email housingsolutions@runnymede.gov.uk

What happens next?

Feedback from the public consultation will be included in a report that will be presented to the Runnymede Council Housing Committee who will make the final decision on the new scheme. It is expected that an updated Allocations Scheme will come into effect in the Spring of 2021.
Overview of proposed changes

Runnymede Council are proposing a number of changes to the current Allocations Scheme, which was last revised in 2017. Since that time, legislative changes have been introduced which Councils must incorporate into their schemes. The scheme must ensure that those in the greatest need are prioritised to ensure that they have the best chance of being offered social housing in the future.

Proposal 1: Local Connection criteria: Increasing the criteria by which someone working in the borough but not living in the borough of Runnymede can go on the Housing Register from 12 months to 3 years.

The Government is of the view that, in deciding who qualifies or does not qualify for social housing, local authorities should ensure that they prioritise applicants who can demonstrate a close association with their local area, for example employment in the district.

The current scheme allows households that have worked in the borough for the last 12 months onto the Housing Register, compared with households living in the borough who are required to have residence here for the last three continuous years.

To improve the fairness of the scheme, it is proposed to increase the number of years of employment in the borough to be aligned with living in the borough.

Proposal 2: Change the qualification for Independent Retirement Living (Sheltered housing) so that applicants who do not meet the local connection criteria are able to register if they have a family member in the borough who does meet the local connection criteria.

There is a shortage of social homes available in the borough but lower demand for accommodation designed for older people. The current scheme enables anyone, regardless of local connection, to join the Housing Register for older persons housing.

In order to ensure social homes are let to those with an association to the borough, we are proposing to change the local connection rules so only those applying for older persons accommodation are able to join the Housing Register if they have a family member in the borough that meets the local connection rules.

These applicants would have a lower banding than those who have a local connection in their own right.

Proposal 3: Add separated spouses of armed forces personnel to local connection exemptions and priority banding

The statutory guidance strongly encourages local authorities to exempt from any local connection requirements divorced or separated spouses or civil partners of service personnel who need to move out of accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence. It is proposed that these individuals are not subject to a local connection criteria.

Proposal 4: Review the financial limits for households joining the Housing Register
The Government believes that it is appropriate, proportionate and in the public interest to restrict access in this way, to ensure that, as far as possible, sufficient affordable housing is available for local people who are on low incomes or otherwise disadvantaged and who would find it particularly difficult to find a home on the open market.

The current scheme disqualifies anyone with over £16,000 in assets. It also disqualifies any single or couple households with a net household income of £30,000 or more and family households with a net income of £50,000 or more. These figures were set in 2017 and part of the review considers if these are still appropriate in 2021.

**Proposal 5: Simplify the banding structure from A, B, C1, C2, D1, D2 to A, B, C, D, E**

The current banding structure is confusing for applicants and it is proposed that the banding structure is simplified to a straightforward letter banding system.

**Proposal 6: Exclude applicants from joining the Housing Register if they have no identified housing need**

Social housing is a limited resource and demand outweighs supply. It is proposed that if a household is suitably housed, regardless of their tenure, they will be unable to register for social housing in Runnymede.

For example, if a household is living in an appropriately sized property that meets their needs, it is affordable, there are no issues with disrepair and they are not at risk of any harm, they would not be entitled to join the Housing Register.

**Proposal 7: Reduce the number of reasonable offers from two to one for all applicants**

In the current scheme households are entitled to two reasonable offers (other than homeless households who receive one offer). This means that a household can choose what to apply for and if they are offered a property, they are able to refuse the offer and wait for a second offer.

Given that the Housing Register is intended to be a list for those in housing need and due to the financial implications of properties being empty, it is proposed that all households are entitled to one suitable offer only.

**Proposal 8: Introduce a requirement for all households to bid for a property within a reasonable period or the system will place bids automatically**

Households have the freedom to chose what property they apply for but this can mean that a household does not apply for anything when there are suitable properties available that they could have applied for. This gives a false impression of the length of time households are required to wait for social housing.

It is proposed that if a household does not bid within a reasonable period, their application will be set to auto-bid. The system will then generate bids for suitable properties on behalf of the applicant taking into account the needs identified in the application such as mobility requirements.

**Proposal 9: Reduce the review procedure from a two stage review process to a one stage review and increase the time for completing reviews from 10 working days to 56 days.**

There is no statutory responsibility on the Council to undertake two reviews of decisions made about Housing Register applications. These reviews are time consuming and
historically they have rarely changed the decision that was reached at stage one. An applicant is able to submit a change of circumstances form at any time and any new information triggers a fresh assessment. If they disagree with the decision on the review, they are also able to pursue the corporate complaints procedure.

Reviews are complex and often take longer than 10 working days. The statutory guidance recommends that reviews are completed within 56 days and we propose to amend the scheme to reflect that.

Summary

The proposed changes to the Allocations Scheme aim to ensure that households with a defined connection to Runnymede and with a housing need are assessed and prioritised within the appropriate priority band category and banding. This will enable them to bid for available social housing properties and ensure those with the greatest need have a chance of being considered for social housing. The proposed scheme will ensure that the way Runnymede Council allocates social housing is fair and lawful.

Frequently asked questions

1. What is Runnymede's Allocations Scheme?
The housing Allocations Scheme sets out who is eligible for social housing and who is considered to qualify for social housing in Runnymede. It sets out how applicant's needs will be assessed and what priority will be given. It sets out how social housing will be advertised and let. A copy of the current scheme is available here.

2. Why is the Council proposing changes to its housing Allocations Scheme?
Under the Localism Act 2011 councils were given more freedom to decide who can and cannot join their Housing Register and who can be allocated social housing. Since the current scheme was introduced in 2017 there have been a number of legislative changes and new regulations that councils must incorporate into their schemes. The scheme needs to be updated to reflect these changes and to remain lawful. It is also important to regularly review the Allocations Scheme to ensure that it meets its intended purpose of ensuring the valuable resource of social housing is allocated to those with the greatest housing need.

3. What are the main change the Council is proposing to make?
In summary we are proposing to make changes to the scheme by:
- Increasing the criteria by which someone working in the borough but not living in the borough of Runnymede can go on the Housing Register from 12 months to 3 years
- Change the qualification for retirement housing so that applicants who cannot meet the local connection criteria are able to join if they have a family member in the borough who does meet the local connection criteria
- Add separated spouses of armed forces to local connection exemptions and priority banding
- Review the financial limits for households joining the Housing Register
• Simplify the banding structure from A, B, C1, C2, D1, D2 to A, B, C, D, E
• Update the banding to reflect local need
• Exclude applicants from joining the Housing Register if they have no identified housing need
• Reduce the number of reasonable offers from two to one for all applicants
• Introduce a requirement for all households to bid for a property within a reasonable period or the system will place bids automatically
• Reduce the review procedure from a two stage review process to a one stage review and increase the time for completing reviews from 10 working days to 56 days.

4. How will the changes affect me?
Once the new scheme is adopted the Council will undertake a re-registration activity. This will mean that anyone that is already on the Councils Housing Register will be contacted and asked if they wish to remain on the Housing Register. Anyone that does wish to remain on the Housing Register will be expected to complete a re-registration form which will be assessed against the new scheme.

The outcome of this assessment may mean there is no change to your application, however it may mean that you no longer qualify to be on the Housing Register. If you are no longer considered to qualify for the scheme you will be written to outlining the reasons for the decision and you will have the right to request the decision is reviewed by a senior officer.

The reregistration could also mean an increase or decrease in your current banding. You will retain the right of review against this decision should you disagree.

If you fail to re-register within the specified time, which is likely to be within 28 days but you wish to re-join the Housing Register, you will need to submit a new application and this will be considered as a new application including a new waiting date.

5. How can I comment on the proposals?
The Council is holding a statutory consultation for the public to provide their views and comments. This can be found here.
Questionnaire

Consultation on proposed changes to the Runnymede Borough Council
housing Allocations Scheme

Introduction
Runnymede Council are consulting on proposed changes to the housing Allocations
Scheme. Information you provide through the consultation will be used to inform the final
scheme. Your responses will not be linked to an existing housing application, if applicable,
and will not impact on any services you currently receive from the Council.

The survey should take around 15 minutes to complete. All information you provide as part
of the public consultation will be used and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act
2018.

This consultation will be open until Sunday 21 February 2021.

Proposal 1: Local Connection criteria: Increasing the criteria by which someone
working in the borough but not living in Runnymede can go on the Housing Register
from 12 months to 3 years.

Current situation
An applicant that has continuously resided in borough for the last three continuous years has
a local connection to Runnymede.

Any permanent adult member of the household that is in and has been in continuous
employment in the borough for more than 12 months will have a local connection to
Runnymede

Proposed change
It is proposed that the 12 month working criteria is increased to 3 years so that it is
consistent with the 3 year residency requirement within the scheme.

Consultation Question
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that working households will need
to have been in continuous employment within Runnymede to meet the local connection
criteria?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know/can't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:
Proposal 2: Change the qualification for Independent Retirement Living (Sheltered housing) so that applicants who cannot meet the local connection criteria are able to join if they have a family member in the borough who does meet the local connection criteria

Current situation

An applicant that is single and over 55 years of age or couples where the youngest person is over 55 who are looking for independent retirement living or sheltered housing only are able to join the Housing Register without a local connection.

Proposed change

It is proposed that applicants who are single and over 55 years of age or couples where the youngest person is over 55, will require a family member in the area who meets the defined local connection criteria, otherwise they will not be able to join.

For example, a person over 55 applies for the Housing Register without a local connection but their sister has lived in the area for the last three continuous years, they would be eligible.

Consultation Question

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that applicants for independent retirement living or sheltered housing must have a connection through a family member meeting the local connection rules?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know/can’t say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

Proposal 3: Add separated spouses of armed forces to local connection exemptions and priority banding

Current situation

Members of the armed forces are able to join the Housing Register without a local connection to the borough if they are required to leave army accommodation. Separated and divorced spouses are not currently included in the scheme.

Proposed change

It is proposed that separated and divorces spouses are able to join the Housing Register without a local connection, if they are required to leave army accommodation, in accordance with government guidance.

Consultation Question

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that separated and divorced spouses of armed forces personnel should be able to join the Housing Register without a local connection?
### Proposal 4: Review the financial limits for households joining the Housing Register

**Current situation**

Applicants with savings and assets over £16,000 are excluded from joining the Housing Register.

Single or couple households with a net income of £30,000 or more are unable to join the Housing Register.

Family households with a net income of £50,000 or more are unable to join the Housing Register.

**Proposed change**

It is proposed that the income limits are reviewed and brought in line with 2021 as these limits were set in 2017.

**Consultation Question**

What do you consider to be appropriate savings and asset limit to be for applicants joining the Housing Register?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum of £5,000</th>
<th>Maximum of £10,000</th>
<th>Maximum of £15,000</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>No saving and asset limit</th>
<th>Don’t know/can’t say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

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**Consultation Question**

What do you consider to be appropriate income limits for singles/couples and families?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singles/Couples</th>
<th>£25,000</th>
<th>£30,000</th>
<th>£35,000</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>No income limit</th>
<th>Don’t know/can’t say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:
Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>£40,000</th>
<th>£50,000</th>
<th>£60,000</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>No income limit</th>
<th>Don't know/can't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

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**Proposal 5: Simplify the banding structure from A, B, C1, C2, D1, D2 to A, B, C, D, E**

**Current situation**

Applicants for the Housing Register are awarded a band from A, B, C1, C2, D1 or D2 depending on the assessment of their housing needs in accordance with the scheme,

**Proposed change**

It is proposed that the banding structure is simplified to a straightforward letter system of A, B, C, D, E.

**Consultation Question**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to simplify the banding structure?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know/can't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

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**Proposal 6: Exclude applicants from joining the Housing Register if they have no identified housing need**

**Current situation**

Secure and flexible tenants of Runnymede Council without any identified housing need are able to join the waiting list in Band D2.

Applicants living in the private rented sector, whether with friends or as a lodger or on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy who is adequately and suitably housed is able to join the Housing Register in Band D2.

**Proposed change**

It is proposed that these groups of applicants would no longer be able to join the Housing Register. The list is for those with an identified need so that the limited social housing stock is let to households that require it the most.

**Consultation Question**
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to exclude households that are adequately housed from joining the Housing Register?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know/can't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

Proposal 7: Reduce the number of reasonable offers from two to one for all applicants

Current situation

Households who make a homelessness application to the Council and for whom a main duty (offer of secure accommodation) is owed, do not access the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system but are made one direct offer of accommodation.

Applicants to the Housing Register can bid for properties though the CBL system and are shortlisted according to their band and waiting time. These applicants are entitled to 2 reasonable offers (some applicants currently bid on properties and then refuse them). After the second refusal (of a reasonable offer) the priority banding is reduced and the applicant is placed in a lower band with a loss of the time accrued. The decision to reduce the priority will be subject to the review process ensuring that an applicant can request any change of circumstances or exceptional circumstances be considered.

Proposed change

It is proposed that all applicants have one offer of suitable housing only. A refusal of a suitable reasonable offer will result in a lower banding and loss of originally accrued waiting time.

Consultation Question

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to make one suitable offer only to all households on the waiting list?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know/can't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

Proposal 8: Introduce a requirement for all households to bid for a property within a reasonable period or the system will place bids automatically

Current situation
Applicants are awarded a banding dependent on their situation. Many applicants awarded a priority Band do not place a bid for many years as they are waiting for a type of property or location, in some cases as limited as a specific street or property. As they are accruing waiting time this can mean that they will secure a property ahead of someone with the same priority and a genuine urgent need to move due to their accrued waiting time. It is important to ensure that the Allocation Scheme prioritises those applicants in highest need at the time ahead of applicants without an urgent need exercising a preference to move to a specific property.

Proposed change

It is proposed that if an applicant has failed to bid for any suitable properties within a set period of time, their application will be set to auto bid. The system will then automatically generate bids on behalf of the applicant.

A property offered as a result of an auto-bid will be subject to the reasonableness test in terms of suitability to meet the applicants housing needs under the Allocation Scheme and can be challenged through the statutory review process.

Consultation Question

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that if applicants do not bid for properties that are available for them, that after a set period they are set to auto bid?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know/can't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

What period do you feel is an appropriate length of time for applicants to bid for properties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 months</th>
<th>6 months</th>
<th>9 months</th>
<th>12 months</th>
<th>18 months</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

Proposal 9: Reduce the review procedure from a two stage review process to a one stage review and increase the time for completing reviews from 10 working days to 56 days.

Current situation

All applicants have the right to submit a review within 21 days of a decision made in respect of their application for example the decision to exclude them from joining or the decision made on their banding they have been awarded.

The Council will undertake a stage one review of the decision, completed by a more senior officer to the original decision maker within 10 working days. Should the applicant disagree
with the outcome of the review, the applicant can request a stage 2 review, which will be carried out by an officer more senior to the stage one decision maker.

The reviews are time consuming and the government guidance recommends decisions are made within 56 days. There is no statutory duty on the Council to have two review stages.

Proposed change

It is proposed that all applicants have one review stage, which will be carried out by a more senior officer to the original decision maker and this will be completed as soon as practical but within 56 days.

Consultation Question

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce the review procedure from two review stages to one?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know/can't say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please use this box to give reasons for your answer:

Equality

Runnymede Council is committed to promoting equality and will be considering how these proposed changes might affect people with protected characteristics who are protected under the Equality Act:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

From the list above, do you feel that any particular group of people will be affected more than others by the proposed changes? This could be positive or negative. If so, please let us know:

About you
Please tell us about yourself so that we can ensure we make consultation more accessible and inclusive. All personal information will be kept completely confidential and will not be transferred to any third party. It is also not linked to your existing application for housing, if applicable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you currently:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A council tenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A housing association tenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A private tenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A homeowner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with friends or family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A local voluntary organisation or advocacy service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A homeless household accepted by Runnymede Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>An existing tenant not seeking a transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>An existing tenant seeking a transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other applicant on the Housing Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A voluntary sector organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above (please specify)</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your age group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
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<td>45-54</td>
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<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
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<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
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<tr>
<td>75+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to self-describe</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which ethnic group are you</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White other</td>
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<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black Caribbean</td>
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<tr>
<td>White and Black African</td>
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<tr>
<td>White and Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thank you for completing the questionnaire

What happens next?

If you are completing a paper version of the questionnaire, please return it to:

Housing Allocations Policy Review
Runnymede Borough Council
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey
KT15 2AH

Once we have gathered the views of everyone who replies to this consultation, we will review the findings of the consultation and submit a new housing Allocations Scheme to the Council’s Housing Committee for consideration in due course. Once agreed, we will publish the new Allocations Scheme on the Council’s website.