

Community Wellbeing and Housing



12 February 2025 (Briefing Pack)

Title	Armed Forces Local Connection Changes
Purpose of the report	To note
Report Author	Steph Green, Assistant Strategic Housing Lead
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Addressing Housing Need
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: Note the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) Regulation and the small change made to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.
Reason for Recommendation	Not applicable.

Summary of the report

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new regulation came into effect 18th December 2024 to ensure that no Veterans of the Regular Armed Forces will need to meet a local connection test for housing register applications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been a legislative change that we need to comply with.
This is what we want to do about it	These are the next steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief the Committee that Officers made a small adjustment to the Housing Allocations policy to ensure the Council complies with the new regulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This briefing report provides more information on the regulation and a small change to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.

- 1.1 This report seeks to brief the Committee on the amended Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) Regulation and the small change made to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 The amended regulation took effect from 18th December 2024 to exempt all Veterans of the Regular Armed Forces from local connection tests across England.
- 2.2 Before this, only those who had served within 5 years before making an application were exempt from local connection tests.
- 2.3 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have laid this regulation to facilitate access of social housing for members of the Regular Armed Forces.
- 2.4 Consequently, to ensure that the Council complies with the new regulation, Officers have updated the Council's Housing Allocations Policy to remove the very small section of wording that specified 'within 5 years of discharge'.
- 2.5 The amended section is as follows (new wording is coloured in red):

"2.3.2 Exceptions to qualification criteria

(ii) Special Arrangements for Armed Forces

Under this policy, Spelthorne Borough Council will not disqualify the following applicants on the grounds that they do not have a local connection with the authority's district:

- (a) *Members of the regular Armed Forces and former personnel of the regular Armed Forces, ~~where the application is made within five years of discharge~~ **regardless of when they last served.**"*

3. Options analysis and proposal

- 3.1 Not applicable, this report is to note only.

4. Financial management comments

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. Risk management comments

- 5.1 There may be a small increase in the number of applications from members of the Armed Forces. However, the regulation applies to all councils in England so any new burden will be shared. Officers will monitor any subsequent impact of the changes.

6. Procurement comments

- 6.1 Not applicable.

7. Legal comments

- 7.1 Prior to adjusting the Housing Allocations Policy wording, Officers consulted with Committees and Legal who advised that as this is a legislative change requiring the Council to update its policy, there's no decision needed by Committee. However, it was recommended that a note was submitted to the Committee briefing pack to update members.

8. Other considerations

- 8.1 Spelthorne Borough Council is committed to supporting the Armed Forces Community and signed the Armed Forces Covenant in April 2014.

8.2 The Armed Forces Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Surrey recommends that for social housing applications, discretion should be considered for Armed Forces applicants where their service commitment means that they cannot meet local eligibility criteria.

9. Equality and Diversity

10. MHCLG notes that the provisions recognise the special position of members of the Armed Forces (and their families) whose employment requires them to be mobile and who are likely therefore to be particularly disadvantaged by local connection requirements; as well as those injured reservists who may need to move to another local authority district to access treatment, care or support.

11. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

11.1 Not applicable.

12. Timetable for implementation

12.1 The regulation was made 18th December 2024. Officers were informed of the changes at a webinar with MHCLG on the 14th January 2025. Officers updated and republished the Housing Allocations policy on 16th January 2025.

13. Contact

13.1 HousingStrategy@spelthorne.gov.uk

**Please submit any material questions to the Committee Chair and Officer
Contact by two days in advance of the meeting.**

Background papers: None

Appendices: None