

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Review of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>23 September 2015</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Interim Executive Director Environment Development &amp; Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>James Crane</b>	<b>Tel: 29- 3316</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report proposes that the council carries out a fundamental review of the Policy used to allocate council housing and to nominate to housing associations. This will mean developing a new Housing Allocations policy in consultation with a number of statutory and voluntary sector organisations. Residents will also be key stakeholders in the development and consultation of this policy. This is to ensure that we make best use of the limited housing resources we have available.
- 1.2 The Housing Register currently contains over 22,000 applicants. The council however only allocates in the region of 500 or 600 properties within its own housing stock and nominates around 150 to 200 housing association properties each year.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Housing & New Homes Committee approves a review and consultation of the Policy used to allocate social housing in the city.
- 2.2 A new Housing Allocation Scheme is submitted for approval to a future Housing & New Homes Committee by the end of March 2016.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Councils are legally obliged, under the Housing Act 1996 Part 6, to have a policy and procedures that must be followed when they allocate social housing both within its own stock or where they nominate to a housing association. In 2011 the Government introduced further legislation that, subject to certain groups having a "reasonable preference" in any allocations policy, the council would be free to make local decisions on how best to allocate housing resources that meets the need of local people.
- 3.2 The Government issued a Code of Guidance to which the council must have due regard to when formulating its Allocation Policy. A Code of Guidance was issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in June 2012.

This guidance was updated in December 2013 and 2015 to give further guidance on residency and local connection.

- 3.3 The council is obliged to have a scheme that determines the priority that will be given to people who apply for housing. It must also have procedures that include the person or description of persons who make decisions under the policy.
- 3.4 Although the council has some control over the allocation of accommodation there are a number of factors that the council has to include in order for the allocations scheme to be considered lawful, i.e. the legislation sets out who we have to give reasonable preference and additional preference to. For anyone to be allocated accommodation they will have to be considered eligible under the Act.
- 3.5 The Allocations Scheme has been changed on a number of occasions over the past 17 years and it is felt that taking a fundamental root and branch review is now required to both the policy and procedures. The last policy review was carried out in 2012. There are a number of areas where the current policy does not conform to the latest government guidance.
- 3.6 The Allocations Policy requires the approval of members of the Housing & New Homes Committee. The way that the policy is then implemented is dealt with by procedural guidance issued to staff. This guidance looks at who is authorised to make decisions, if this is not included in the Policy. Over the summer period the Housing Needs Division has been undertaking Business Process Improvement (BPI) planning of the operational practices to look at how we deliver our services to the public. Officers have been actively involved at looking at our delivery methods and especially to look at areas where there is any duplication in process or handovers between one section and another. The service is now at a stage where it is looking to pilot new way to deliver service in a more holistic manner. At the heart of this process has been delivery of services that benefit the customer. The new delivery model looks at customers having fewer officers involved in the assessment their case. The changes will also look to provide improved front line customer contact by merging staff from different teams into a front facing contact service and merging staff to improve telephone access.

At the end of the Pilot there will be an evaluation of the changes to make sure that they are fit for purpose and bring additional value to our customers.

#### **4.0 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 There is an option not to review the current Housing Allocations Scheme. The current scheme at it stands is not necessarily housing our residents in the greatest housing need. It is also important to note that as demand far out weighs supply in this area that by including vast numbers of applicants onto the housing register the council are building up unrealistic expectation the council is unlikely to be able to assist most households unless they are in very high need. The growth in the numbers of applicants leads to an increase in administration as people seek to increase their banding on the system. This in turn leads to higher levels of complaints, enquires and bureaucracy that does not lead to any higher number of households being offered housing solutions.
- 4.2 There is an option to partially review the allocations scheme. This could look at some areas of the scheme such as local connection or prioritisation of the banding structure. This option again is unlike to address the fundamental issue that the demand exceeds supply and again fails to manage expectations that the council is unlikely to assist most households unless they are in very high need.

#### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 This report is not the subject of consultation as it requests the authority of members to review and start consultation regarding a future Housing Allocations Scheme. The review itself will be the subject to a full consultation exercise with the following stakeholders:
- Councillors
  - Registered social landlords with stock in the city
  - Tenants and residents associations
  - Housing register applicants
  - Communities of interest including BME & LGBT
  - Neighbouring councils
  - Voluntary sector organisations
  - Residents of the city
- 5.2 The consultation methods will include:
- Public meetings
  - Residents survey on the website
  - Meetings with stakeholders
- 5.3 A draft consultation paper will be produced that will look at possible changes to the current allocations policy. This paper will form the basis of our engagement with the city on the future allocation of social housing. The council is obliged to send a draft copy of any proposed changes to the Allocations policy to any registered social landlord where we have an agreement that allows us to nominate applicants to them. The council has operated a Joint Housing Register with a number of providers and they will be invited to take part in the development of a new allocations policy for the city. The council is also legally obliged to notify all housing register applicants of any significant changes that are approved.

5.4 The consultation will take place between October and December 2015.

## 6 CONCLUSION

6.1 The council has a statutory obligation to have a scheme in order to allocate social housing in the city. The Housing Allocation Scheme is in need of a total review in order to make the housing register into a manageable number of applicants who have a realistic chance of being offered social housing in the city and to ensure we make the best use of the available social housing. This policy needs to acknowledge the high levels of needs within certain groups and to offer better housing options to those that do not qualify for social housing in the City.

## 7.0 FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

7.1 This report proposes a fundamental review of the current policy and procedures used to allocate social housing in the City. Any costs of the review will need to be met within current revenue budgets for 2015/16 and reflected in the budget monitoring forecasts for the service.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks Date: 18/08/15*

### Legal Implications:

7.2 Section 3 of the report briefly sets out the statutory requirements in Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 relating to the Allocations Policy.

Before adopting an allocation scheme, or making an alteration to their scheme reflecting a major change of policy, a local housing authority in England must send a copy of the draft scheme, or proposed alteration, to every private registered provider of social housing and registered social landlord with which they have nomination arrangements and afford those persons a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals. Whilst there is no statutory requirement to consult more widely, it is good practice to do so.

In preparing a new scheme the council must have regard to their current homelessness strategy and their current tenancy strategy.

*Lawyer Consulted: Name Liz Woodley Date: 14/08/15*

### 7.3 Equalities Implications:

An equalities impact assessment will be carried out to take a look at the likely impact of any changes that are proposed in the Housing Allocation Policy and Procedure review.

7.4 Sustainability Implications:

Applicants have many reasons to apply to the housing register for social housing. Any allocations policy needs to have regard to a person's ability to be ready to hold and maintain a social tenancy. The impact on granting someone a tenancy if they are not ready to do so can be felt by the individual who may face rent arrears and eviction proceeding. Communities can also be majorly affected if people are not ready to hold a tenancy and cause anti social behaviour that can blight people lives.

7.5 Any Other Significant Implications:

None.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

None

**Documents in Members' Rooms**

None

**Background Documents**

None

Crime & Disorder Implications:

None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

None

Public Health Implications:

None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

None

