



Doncaster Council

Report

6th March 2018

To The Chair and Members of CABINET

Doncaster Council Housing Allocation Policy Review

Relevant Member(s)	Cabinet	Wards Affected	Key Decision
All		All wards	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report sets out the key proposed changes to Doncaster Council's Housing Allocations Policy following a review of the policy and response to emerging legislation. It also highlights the outcomes from the consultation.
 - 1.1 A key part of the review process has been to undertake significant consultation with customer, key stakeholder and elected members. This consultation process helps to ensure that we continue to have a policy that meets the needs of Doncaster people.
 - 1.2 The overall objectives of the Housing Allocations Policy are to:
 - Continue to house those in need within Doncaster.
 - Support stable and vibrant communities;
 - Reflect local priorities;
 - Make the best use of housing stock;
 - Have a clear system in place setting out a framework of eligibility, qualification and priority of access to council homes and nominations made to Housing Associations;
 - Fulfil the Council's Obligations under Part VI and VII of the 1996 Housing Act and Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. NO EXEMPTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Cabinet are asked to agree the Council's Housing Allocations Policy revisions to be implemented from April 2018.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

4. This policy sets out the revised framework for housing allocations of council homes and housing association nominations in Doncaster. Each year approximately 1,500 council homes out of a total housing stock of approximately 20,200 homes are re-let. This review aims to ensure that the policy is fit for purpose and responsive to changes in housing demand.

BACKGROUND

5. The Housing Allocations Policy was last reviewed and changes agreed in December 2012 following publication of the Localism Act 2011. The policy was implemented in August 2013, after a full review of the Housing Register and updates to the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) IT system.

- 5.1 In 2016/17, at the request of Doncaster Council, St Leger Homes completed a review of the existing policy, which identified 3 proposed changes which were subject to public consultation with customer and key stakeholders

- 5.2 In March 2017 it was agreed that the implementation of the proposed changes be paused to enable an effective policy response to:

- The impact of welfare reforms locally;
- The Housing and Planning Act (H&PA) 2016;
- A review of the homeless system and what the barriers are to effectively supporting resettlement;
- The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and draft code of guidance.

- 5.3 A further review from October 2017 to January 2018 identified further proposed changes.

PROPOSALS TO BE IMPLEMENTED

6. The proposed key changes to the policy are set out below:

- 6.1 **Proposal 1 – Allowing predominantly older owner occupiers onto the housing register** to enable them to access appropriate accommodation, where they have no more than one property that they have equity in, and the equity does not exceed £120k.

- This proposed change recognises that rehousing applicants in this category can reduce pressure on potential social care assistance and also makes best

use of the housing stock by providing another housing option to predominantly older people.

6.2 Proposal 2 - Include a 'Right to Move' exception to the local connection criteria to reflect a legal requirement for council and housing association tenants who need to move to a particular location for employment under the 'Right to Move'

- A legal Right to Move for social housing tenants was introduced in March 2015 under an amendment to section 169 of the Housing Act 1996 for those who need to move to take up a job or live closer to employment or training to support social mobility. We are currently accommodating this under any special circumstances within the local connection exemptions; however, we want to make this an explicit category.

6.3 Proposal 3 – A direct officer for full duty homeless applicants who have not bid on available properties. Where applicants are assessed in the platinum band with a full housing duty in accordance with part vii of the housing act 1996 and homelessness act 2002, as amended by the homeless reduction act 2017 who have not placed a bid on suitable and reasonable accommodation after one month, will have the duty discharged by a suitable offer of accommodation. Applicants will still have the right to review under the homelessness legislation if they think that the accommodation offered is unsuitable.

- To assist an applicant to move on into suitable accommodation as quickly as possible and enable a more streamlined process into a permanent home. To manage customers' expectations and ensure that there is also a quicker move on from temporary accommodation, ensuring best use of specialised supported accommodation.

6.4 Proposal 4 – Create a homeless prevention priority where an applicant is not entitled to any help with their housing costs, to prevent a homeless presentation. Suspending and backdating applications and activating them when they are able to afford accommodation

- This would include cases where parents say that a young adult has to move out (Family License Termination), which, in many cases, significantly impacts on the life chances of the young person. By backdating the applicant's effective date (priority will be based on their circumstances at the time of reactivating their application) the applicant can make a planned move without being disadvantaged. This would also alleviate pressure on the frontline homelessness service and provision of temporary accommodation.

6.5 Proposal 5 – Create a resettlement status in the platinum band to support rehousing to settled accommodation from a resettlement pathway, with an effective date backdated to the date they engaged with the resettlement process.

- To support early intervention and prevention through a resettlement pathway process by registering a pending housing application. When it is deemed they are ready and able to manage a tenancy, the application will be activated and given Platinum priority, with their effective date being the date the applicant started to engage in the resettlement process. This would enable the applicant to be higher up the waiting list as a recognition that they

have worked through the resettlement pathway. This would enable more effective move on from supported housing placements to make places available for those who need them.

6.6 **Proposal 6 - Removal of the debt element criteria for applicants under the resettlement status as a reason to refuse access to the register**

- Significant investment goes into supporting individuals through the resettlement process. The current requirement to have no housing related debt is a barrier to effectively addressing the impacts of rising homelessness and resulting in applicants not moving out of expensive supported accommodation into independent living. This is also resulting in applicants falling back into rough sleeping and is undermining the opportunities we have to address rough sleeping as individuals feel that it's pointless working with services because we won't house them anyway because they owe a debt. The debt will not be written off, just disregarded for access to the housing register.

CONSULTATION

7. Consultation was initially carried out in December 2016 and January 2017 with Council and St Leger Homes employees, St Leger Homes Board, council tenants, partners, stakeholders, housing providers and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for housing. Details of the consultation are included in the background papers to this report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 It is recommended that 6 proposals are adopted and included within the new Allocations Policy.

- 8.2 The proposal that is not recommended for adoption of those consulted upon is that which would restrict applicants from bidding for properties that are bigger than their identified need where a financial viability assessment shows that they would be unaffordable. The unaffordability would be as a result of welfare reform changes that introduced the Social Sector Size Criteria, commonly known as the 'Bedroom Tax'. The reason for not recommending adoption is based on the responses to the consultation where 29% of respondents felt that this was not appropriate and that it did not take account of the longer term need for growing families or changes in financial circumstances. Responses to the consultation from elected members also highlighted these issues.

- 8.3 For all the proposals, the majority of respondents to the consultation were agreement with the changes. On two of the proposals the percentage of respondents who disagreed with the changes was over 10%, whilst it is acknowledged that not everyone was in agreement; it is felt that the benefits of implementing the proposed changes outweigh the perceived negative feedback. The rationale for still implementing the changes is set out below:

- **Accepting predominantly older owners into the General Band** - widening access to affordable appropriate housing options in this way promotes independent living and reduce demand on support services e.g. adaptations and Adult Social Care. The policy will ensure that those able to resolve their

situation with low or no housing needs are given the lowest priority. It is therefore not a detriment to all other applicants.

- **Removal of debt criteria for access to housing register for applicant in Resettlement Priority** – Removing this criterion will ensure that applicants who have had a material change in their circumstance and are engaging in the resettlement pathways have the opportunity to move out of supported accommodation into independent living. Access to permanent housing because of previous debt is a key barrier for applicants who are in supported housing. Significant investment is made in supporting individuals to stop rough sleeping and undertake a resettlement journey, to hold a previous debt as a reason to prevent someone who is ready to move to independent living from doing so doesn't make sense. It also results in applicants falling back into rough sleeping as they do not see the point of undertaking a challenging resettlement pathway with no opportunity of housing at the end of the journey.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

9. To ensure the objectives of the Housing Allocations Policy are delivered in relation to providing stable and cohesive communities whilst making the best use of stock and meeting housing need in Doncaster with the resources available.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

10. The implications on the council's key outcomes are as follows:

Outcomes	Implications
<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	<p>Changes to the Housing Allocations Policy will enable Doncaster to meet its legal requirement to enable social housing tenants to register for housing to facilitate access to offers of employment and training.</p>
<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for 	<p>The Housing Allocations Policy is a framework for access to affordable housing to support sustainable tenancies and communities, meeting housing need using the best use of our available resources.</p> <p>All allocations will be made in accordance with Doncaster Council's Tenancy Strategy which defines the type and length of tenancies offered to support vibrant and sustainable communities.</p>

<p>keeping Doncaster Clean</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	
<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	<p>An effective Housing Allocations Policy ensure that properties are allocated to those in need and makes best use of the housing stock. Ensuring families are adequately housed in quality accommodation has a positive impact on educational attainment. The policy supports access to a stable home for those most in need and recognises the need to move on quickly from temporary and unsuitable housing.</p>
<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	<p>Vulnerability is one of the key factors that have been taken into account when identifying housing needs. The inclusion of home owners with a greater equity should have a positive impact on ensuing older people can live independently for longer.</p>
<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	<p>Procedures for the management of allocation of council homes are in place to ensure the process is efficient and customer focused.</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

11. The risk of not accepting the revisions to the Housing Allocations Policy is that the Council would not be making best use of the limited social housing and not have a

fit for purpose policy that had regard to changes in demand and relevant emerging issues.

- 11.1 Not adopting the size restrictions proposal has the potential to allow applicants to put themselves into a position where they are moving into a home that they may struggle to afford which could lead to increased rent arrears and debt. In these circumstances appropriate support will be given to minimise the risk of debt.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...HW..... Date...23.02.18.....]

12. It is a legal requirement under the Housing Act 1996 that the council makes all allocations of housing accommodation in accordance with a published scheme. The Act provides the framework for allocating housing accommodation. The provisions of the Localism Act 2011 allow the council the freedom to determine who qualifies for housing accommodation in its area, and develop solutions, which make best use of its social housing stock.

‘Guidance for Local Authorities in England on the Allocation of Accommodation’ was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in June 2012 and ‘Providing social housing for local people: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England’ was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in December 2013. Local authorities are required to have regard to both these guidance documents when exercising their functions under the Acts.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...JCr..... Date.....08.02.18.....]

13. The financial impact resulting from the implementation of the Housing Allocations Policy review is not yet known and further work will be required to accurately cost this.

The policy will be fit for purpose, ensuring the best use of the housing stock in order to maximise lettings rents and to ensuring the rent loss from void properties is managed effectively.

The proposed changes to the existing IT software to reflect the addition of further information fields and the associated costs of a tri-annual review of the Housing register following the policy being approved will be required, under normal circumstances the review costs will be managed with existing resources.

At this stage no additional resources have been identified should there be any resulting costs be in excess of existing resources.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...AC..... Date...07.02.18..]

14. There are no human resources implications specific to the recommendation to agree the Council’s Housing Allocations Policy.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...PW..... Date...07.02.18.....]

15. It is understood that minor changes will need to be made to the existing Choice

Based Lettings IT system to support the proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy, which St Leger Homes will progress directly with the 3rd party supplier.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...RS..... Date...08.02.17.....]

16. The proposals put forward suggest that the changes to the housing allocation will ensure that barriers to accessing housing are reduced for some of our most vulnerable members of the community. The home environment is important in enabling access to other health improving opportunities, for example employment, social networks, essential services and amenities such as green space. Access to decent and adequate housing is critically important in terms of health and wellbeing. Good housing offers a stable foundation from which to build a home, and does so through providing shelter, security and space for family life and activities, privacy, personal identity and development. The home provides us with a sense of belonging and connection to where we live and acts as a springboard to develop other aspects of our life.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...GS..... Date.....16.02.18.....]

17. A Due Regard Statement has been completed and is attached to this report.
- 17.1 We have considered the impact of the Housing Allocations Policy on access to social housing across Doncaster and recognise that we cannot meet the demand for this type of accommodation within existing turnover. Therefore, it is essential that we make best use of Council stock by ensuring that applicants with the highest housing need are provided with the most appropriate accommodation.
- 17.2 Each protected characteristic has been considered as part of this process.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

18. None

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