

<b>10 December 2014</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Housing Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Housing Allocations Scheme – First Year Review</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Yes	
<b>Report of:</b> Councillor Lyn Worrall, Portfolio Holder for Housing		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Richard Parkin, Head of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

### **Executive Summary**

In May 2013, following an extensive public consultation, the Council introduced a new Housing Allocations Scheme along with a new online housing application form.

The scheme reflected new statutory guidance and requirements under the Localism Act 2011 and Housing Act 1996 parts VI and VII. It also introduced new local preferences.

Subsequently, a first year review of the scheme was undertaken from July to September 2014. Feedback sessions and an online survey for staff, members and partner organisations were undertaken and a copy of the survey results is attached (Appendix 1).

The review identified that only minor changes were required and therefore a full public consultation was not necessary.

Recommendations are now presented to the Committee (Appendix 2) and proposed changes are incorporated into an amended Housing Allocations Scheme document (Appendix 3 - amendments are highlighted).

Alongside the new Allocations scheme the Council has been operating a downsizing incentive scheme in line with section 10.6.7. A new policy document outlines how the incentives will be applied (Appendix 4).

The allocations scheme gave discretion to use private rented accommodation in order to discharge the statutory rehousing duty towards homeless people. A policy document outlining how that duty will be discharged has also been written (Appendix 5)

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 That Members approve the recommended changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme identified in Appendix 2 and the subsequent amendments made to the Allocations Scheme document in Appendix 3**

**1.2 That members approve the downsizing policy and incentive scheme (Appendix 4)**

**1.3 That members approve the policy document regarding discharge of the homeless duty into the private sector (Appendix 5)**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

The new Housing Allocations scheme was implemented in May 2013 along with a new online housing application form.

Changes introduced reflected local preferences and statutory requirements under the Localism Act and original Housing Act 1996 part VI and VII.

These included:

- Stricter qualifying criteria – through local connection, financial means and behaviour of the applicants
- A Proportion of properties (25%) let only to transferring tenants
- A Proportion of properties (15%) let only to working households or those who could evidence they provided care or some form of volunteer work
- Recycling adapted properties
- Downsizing incentives
- Priorities and concessions for the armed forces
- Changes to time limits for priority bidding
- Changes to the number of refusals that an applicant could make

After one year a review of the scheme was undertaken.

Areas identified for review included the introduced changes above, and the following:

- Number of refusals & impact on voids
- Direct offers and sensitive lettings
- Decommissioning of sheltered properties including ex warden houses
- Local lettings policies
- Financial assessment for qualification criteria

The review also allowed process updates to be included in the policy document:

- Requirement for rent in advance to be paid at sign up

- Improved procedures around assignments including mutual exchanges
- Policy on discharge of the homeless duty into the private sector

### 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of options

Options for changes were considered as part of the consultation and are reflected in the outcomes of the consultation at Appendix 1

### 4. Reasons for Recommendations

The new Allocations scheme introduced large-scale changes to the way properties are allocated. Subsequently, it was important to reflect on the impact of those changes after the first year to ensure that they were achieving the required outcomes.

Having looked at the impact, recommendations have been made and these are outlined with the reasons for the recommendations in Appendix 2.

### 5. Consultation

A full public consultation was not undertaken but a review involving Members, staff and partner agencies, including an online survey, took place between 25<sup>th</sup> July and 25<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

The following representatives attended the staff and partnership feedback sessions.

Council Staff - Housing	20
Council Staff - Other	2
Family Mosaic	4
Open Door	1
Pohwer	1
SERICCC	1
Sanctuary Housing	2
CMHT	1
Total	32

Member's feedback sessions were held on 23<sup>rd</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> August and the following Members attended

Cllr Liddiard
Cllr T Fish
Cllr Gupta
Cllr R Jones
Cllr L Worrall

Cllr Smith
Cllr Ray
Cllr C Baker
Cllr Shinnick

The outcomes of the feedback sessions are shown within Appendix 2

21 people completed the online survey and the outcomes are shown at Appendix 1

## **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

The demand for social housing far outstrips the stock available and therefore the Council prioritizes certain groups i.e. those on lower incomes and/ or in housing need. Subsequently there are qualifying criteria and these include good tenant like behaviour, a local connection to the borough and a financial threshold. These criteria assist in achieving the Councils corporate priority to “Build pride, responsibility and respect to create safer communities”.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jo Beard**  
**Finance Officer**

A reduction in the sum paid as an incentive for downsizing may reduce the funds required for the incentive scheme for the coming year.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart**  
**Principal Solicitor**

The Council is seeking to utilise powers under the Localism Act 2011 to discharge its homeless duty into the private sector where a homeless duty is accepted. This may lead to a challenges regarding suitability of the offer of accommodation however, applicants have the right of review whether the offer is accepted or not, which should reduce any challenges.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

When the allocations scheme was implemented a full equality impact assessment was undertaken. The subsequent amendments to the scheme will not impact any particular group more than another and there will be no adverse impact on any of the protected equality groups.

- 8. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

- 9. Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 – Housing Allocations review – 1<sup>st</sup> year survey results  
Appendix 2 – Recommended amendments  
Appendix 3 – Amended Housing Allocations scheme (Nov 2014)  
Appendix 4 – Downsizing Policy & Procedure  
Appendix 5 – Discharge homeless duty into Private sector housing

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