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| 2 September 2015 | | ITEM: 7 |
| Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee | | |
| Elizabeth Gardens – Local Lettings Plan | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Key | |
| Report of: Dawn Shepherd, Housing Strategy Manager, Housing | | |
| Accountable Head of Service: Dermot Moloney, Strategic Lead, Housing | | |
| Accountable Director: Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

Elizabeth Gardens is a purpose built extra care scheme for older people in Long Lane, Grays. There are 65 flats and the Council has nomination rights to 47 of these (16 x one bedroom and 31 x two bedroom).

The scheme is managed by Hanover Housing Association who requires nominations from the Council within 5 working days of a property being available to let. If the Council are unable to supply nominees within this timescale then Hanover may select people from their own waiting list.

Eligibility criteria includes the need for extra care support, but applicants must also be eligible for a nomination of social housing which means they must qualify in the usual manner for an allocation i.e. they must have the appropriate local connection etc.

Applicants are also assessed for the number of bedrooms they require according to their household size. A single person or couple would normally be eligible for a one bedroom property however, there may be situations where a two bedroom is required - for example where there is a need for a live in carer or to accommodate large medical equipment.

The Council has no difficulty in nominating applicants for the one bedroom flats, but often cannot find applicants who qualify for the two bedroom flats.

Many applicants who qualify for a one bedroom flat would like to have a two bedroom property but do not qualify under the allocations scheme for two bedrooms.

Subsequently there have been a number of occasions when the Council do not have nominees for two bedroom flats and Hanover have allocated properties to people on their own waiting list; since their waiting list has different criteria this could mean allocations to applicants from outside the borough without the 5 year local connection required by Thurrock Council.

Thurrock Council must nominate within its housing allocations scheme but there is a provision within the scheme that allows local lettings for specific sites where agreed through the Housing Overview and Scrutiny panel.

A local lettings scheme could be used to allow allocations to the two bedroom properties outside of the usual requirements where there are no suitable nominees waiting. This would resolve the issue of losing nominations to applicants with no local connection to the borough and ensure that the Councils own waiting list of applicants take priority.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the committee approves a Local lettings plan for nominations to the two bedroom flats at Elizabeth Gardens.**
- 1.2 That the local lettings plan allows nomination of the two bedroom properties to applicants outside of the usual bedroom size requirement where there are no waiting applicants who meet the usual criteria.**
- 1.3 That when the local lettings plan is used to nominate applicants, couples will take priority over single applicants for the two bedroom properties .**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Elizabeth Gardens is a purpose built extra care scheme for older people in Long Lane, Grays. There are 65 flats in the following combination:

| | To Buy | To Rent | Total |
|-------------|--------|---------|-------|
| One bedroom | 2 | 16 | 18 |
| Two bedroom | 16 | 31 | 47 |
| Total | 18 | 47 | 65 |

- 2.2 The scheme is managed by Hanover Housing Association with whom the Council has a nominations agreement; the Council has nomination rights to all 47 rented units.
- 2.3 Under the nominations agreement, once notified of a vacancy, the Housing department must supply the names of potential tenants to Hanover within 5 working days. If the Council are unable to supply nominees within this timescale then Hanover may select people from their own separate waiting list.
- 2.4 The council has criteria for selecting potential tenants which includes the need for extra care support, but applicants must be eligible for a nomination of social

housing which means they must qualify in the usual manner for an allocation i.e. they must have the appropriate local connection etc. Places are allocated via an allocations panel which includes officers from Housing, Social Care and Health. The panel maintain a waiting list and meet regularly to agree nominees.

- 2.5 Applicants will also be assessed for the number of bedrooms that they require according to their household size. For this type of accommodation the household would usually only consist of a single person or couple who would normally be eligible for a one bedroom property. There may be situations where a two bedroom is required, for example where there is a need for a live in carer or to accommodate large medical equipment.
- 2.6 When the scheme was opened in 2013 an allocations procedure and criteria was implemented.
- 2.7 The allocations panel has no difficulty in allocating to the one bedroom flats, but often cannot find applicants who qualify for the two bedroom flats due to the bedroom size requirement and the larger number of these properties.
- 2.8 Many applicants who qualify for a one bedroom flat would like to have a two bedroom property but do not qualify under the allocations scheme for two bedrooms.
- 2.9 Subsequently there have been a number of occasions when the Council do not have nominees for two bedroom flats and Hanover have allocated properties to people on their own waiting list; since their waiting list has different criteria this could mean allocations to applicants from outside the borough without the 5 year local connection required by Thurrock Council
- 2.10 Thurrock Council must nominate within its housing allocations scheme but there is a provision within the scheme that allows local lettings for specific sites where agreed through the Housing Overview and Scrutiny panel.
- 2.11 A local lettings scheme could be used to allow allocations to the two bedroom properties outside of the usual requirements where there are no suitable nominees waiting. This would resolve the issue of losing nominations to Hanover and ensuring that the Councils own waiting list of applicants take priority.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Rent and Housing Benefit

Tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit would not usually receive the full Housing subsidy for a two bedroom flat where there is only a single person or couple in residence. However, people of pensionable age are not currently affected by the rules and therefore would still be eligible for the higher subsidy.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Extra Care housing is designed for people in need of a higher level of support than can be offered within sheltered housing.
- 4.2 In addition to Elizabeth Gardens, Extra Care housing is available within Thurrock at two other schemes: Piggs Corner and Kynock Court. These are both Council schemes which only offer one bedroom properties.
- 4.3 The Council always have applicants waiting for extra care accommodation, although the numbers on the waiting list do naturally vary from time to time.
- 4.4 Opening up the two bedroom properties at Elizabeth Gardens to applicants waiting for one bedroom properties could potentially reduce the waiting time for a number of applicants. This can be crucial where applicants are currently living in unsuitable accommodation or where they are suffering from dementia and would benefit from a move as early as possible in order to minimise the impact of moving.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Joint meetings have been held between the Housing Directorate, Adult Services Directorate and Hanover and all are in agreement with the recommendation

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

- 6.1 A local lettings plan would help to achieve the Council's priority of improving health & wellbeing for those waiting for extra care accommodation because of the potential to allow an earlier move into more suitable accommodation with support.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Finance Manager

Currently, tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit would not usually receive the full Housing subsidy for a two bedroom flat, however opening up allocations criteria for two bedroom properties could potentially allow tenants to claim a higher subsidy.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**
Housing Solicitor & Team Leader

Under the Housing Act 1996 part VI Councils may only allocate properties within the terms of their published Housing Allocations scheme. This includes nominations to Registered Provider properties.

s.166A(6) Housing Act 1996 enables housing authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall in to the reasonable preference category. This is known as a local lettings plan and may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and other policy objectives.

Thurrock Councils' Housing allocations scheme allows the Housing Overview & Scrutiny committee to agree a local lettings plan to allocate to specific schemes outside of the usual requirements

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities manager

The proposed changes would impact only elderly and disabled applicants with support needs and would have a positive impact by potentially reducing the amount of waiting time for appropriate accommodation for Thurrock applicants.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable.

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):

Not applicable.

9. Appendices to the report

None.

Report Author:

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Housing, Business Development