



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL CABINET
4 JULY 2006

ITEM 7

Report of the Community Commission relating to the former
Community Regeneration Commission

Housing Allocations Policy and Homelessness Topic Review

RECOMMENDATION

1. To receive the report and take into account the recommendations when finalising the new Housing Allocations Policy.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 The attached report was formally approved on 19 June 2006 by the Community Commission, which has taken on the responsibility for scrutinising housing issues from the previous Community Regeneration Commission. The report is being submitted to Council Cabinet now as the subject matter and recommendations link to forthcoming Key Decision 70/05, a new Housing Allocations Policy. The latter is expected to be considered by Council Cabinet on 1 August 2006.
- 2.2 The subject was chosen by the Community Regeneration Commission as a topic review following a consultation process among its members between May and July 2005. The in-depth review was conducted during the autumn of 2005 and the 9 evidence gathering meetings involved 19 interviews. The Commission's own review was paralleled by a separate review organised by the Housing Options Centre, HOC, part of the Housing and Advice Services Division. A fuller description of the process is included in the section 'the Journey to this Report'.
- 2.3 The report is, again, a compact document in order to make it a manageable read for the intended audience. Quotes and comments are referenced to the 249-page Evidence Bundle. The twenty recommendations contained have the unanimous support of the Commission members who conducted the review.

For more information contact: 01322 255596 e-mail rob.davison@derby.gov.uk
Background papers: Evidence Bundle available in Room 137 at the Council House.
List of appendices: Appendix 1 to this covering report – Implications

IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 1 Commentary of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Officer. Any comments of the Corporate Director – Resources will be provided later.

Revenue

The key driver of the Commission's recommendations is to facilitate more moves by current tenants between properties without disadvantaging prospective tenants needing a home. More moves *will* mean a corresponding increase in the landlord costs resulting from a change of tenant, such as checking amenities and effecting any necessary repairs. It is essential that this does not form an obstacle to implementation of the policy. With Derby Homes some offsetting of costs could be achieved if the void period is reduced, in line with recommendation 20.

Recommendation 4 proposes that a new, dedicated officer should be employed to promote tenancy exchanges between and within the different Homefinder landlords.

Recommendation 9 proposes that Local Government Act 2000 "well-being" powers be invoked to assist discrete client groups needing support but who 'fall between the stools' of specific powers. This is envisaged as a small weekly payment to a few landlords to actively monitor and encourage the taking of medication.

Recommendation 17 states that the HOC staffing review should enhance capacity for face-to-face contact with individuals who have difficulty using the Homefinder system and promote even closer working with professionals dealing with sensitive/vulnerable cases. This does not necessarily mean extra staffing costs as the new allocations policy and associated computer software should involve less transaction time and produce a time dividend.

Recommendation 19 asks Council Cabinet to explore establishing a voluntary quality scheme to raise standards in the affordable private rented sector and for bed and breakfast businesses. Such a scheme would require funding, as owners are unlikely to voluntarily participate if there was any cost involved.

Capital

A new software system will be required and recommendation 18 strongly encourages Cabinet to sufficiently fund that replacement system to: i) overcome the several current limitations and problems, ii) ensure the new Allocations Policy can be fully delivered *and* iii) future-proof it against Council or Whitehall-imposed revisions over the next decade.

Legal

- 2 Legal opinion on the draft Allocation Policy, expected to be considered at the next Cabinet meeting, is being sought.

With regard to this report, recommendation 5 proposes that there should be the facility for a tenant to exchange with an empty property, so long as this does not allow trading up. In light of advice given by HOC managers on the draft version the words 'subject to legal opinion on the *vires*' have been added.

Personnel

- 3 None directly arising.

Equalities impact

- 4 The proposals in this report seek to achieve fairer opportunities for existing tenants to be rehoused whilst not undermining the Council's ability to make offers to priority groups. The new computer software needed should make it easier to be understood and used efficiently by more users. A further gain from the new software will be to produce a time dividend for staff and so allow a more personal support to be provided - either directly or through agency professionals - to those individuals who require it.

Council Priorities

- 5 The report offers Council Cabinet a framework that can promote three of the four Council Priorities for 2006-09 **improving the quality of life in Derby's neighbourhoods, building healthy and independent communities and delivering excellent, performance and value for money**. Achieving greater movement among existing tenants will increase the matching between family size and ages and suitable property types and facilities. For example, getting a family with toddlers out of a second floor flat to a home with a garden directly improves their quality of life. Contented residents are more likely to engage with their neighbours and promote community cohesion and build social capital. Similarly, many tenants live in accommodation larger than their needs, perhaps because adult children have flown the nest. If some of these residents can be incentivised to relocate to smaller properties, in areas they would feel comfortable, that unlocks accommodation for growing families. As well as benefiting individuals and their dependants this would also display good corporate stewardship of social housing which remains a scarce resource.