

UPDATE ON THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Allocations Policy was approved on 12 April 2011. We implemented the one month offer for statutory homeless applicants in the same month. Since the introduction of this, anecdotal information shows that:
- approximately 80% of statutory homeless applicants are offered a property within one month of being accepted as homeless.
 - the number of final offers made to statutory homeless applicants has reduced. This is a higher percentage than under the previous policy of three months before a final offer being made.
- 1.2 Without this change in policy our use of temporary accommodation and associated costs would have increased. Therefore the changes have made housing allocations a more cost effective service.
- 1.4 Our monitoring information shows that since June this year out of 38 accepted homeless cases only four did not receive an offer within the one month period, three of which were made an offer within five weeks.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note changes to the Housing Allocations Policy

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To bring changes to the Housing Allocations Policy to the attention of the Board.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 Statutory homeless applicants are now bidding more frequently on Derby Homefinder, and due to the high level of prevention of homeless cases we achieve, the number of accepted statutory homeless cases has reduced.

In April 2011 there were 84 accepted statutory homeless applicants in the Emergency Band.

In April 2012 this had reduced to 49.

4.2 As of September 2012 there are 43.

This reduction in accepted cases has meant that these cases are more actively case managed therefore reducing the number of final offers made.

4.3 **The effect of changes on our customers**

Statutory homeless applicants are getting housed more quickly through bidding for properties of their choice. Through our prevention agenda other applicants threatened with homeless are prevented from becoming homeless by:

- receiving payments from the prevention fund.
- registering on the housing register and applicants bidding on the housing register to receive an offer of housing or by securing an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector with the assistance of the Bond Assurance scheme.

In addition, by securing an offer of housing within one month there has not been the need to use temporary accommodation. We have had no complaints regarding the one month offer period and customers still have the right to request a review on suitability grounds.

We have had no feedback on this so we assume there are no major issues. Applicants are bidding for offers of housing in areas of their choice.

4.4 **Other changes to the Allocations Policy**

Although the new allocations policy was agreed in April 2011 it was not fully implemented. We did start to develop our ICT specification with Software providers so that the implementation could take place. Due to the complexities of the changes and the development time required we anticipated a live date of January 2012. However in mid/ late 2011 the government announced that there would be changes to Allocations Law and guidance through the introduction of the Localism Act. A decision was made to wait for the Localism Act to come into force, and review the policy again rather than fully implement an allocations policy that would shortly change again causing confusion for customers, and unnecessary costs for the Authority. A decision was made to partially implement some key changes in the policy.

4.5 The following changes were implemented in October 2011. These were:

- The number of bids applicants can make each week changed from six to three. We have not had any complaints about this. It has reduced the number of refusals and improved the short listing processes for landlords improving the efficiency of the offer process.
- The introduction of 'unreasonable refusals'; if an applicant unreasonably refused three offers of housing starting from 5 October 2011 they lost their priority and were placed in Derby Homefinder Band C for at least six months. We have placed 35 applicants in band C for this reason. This demonstrates that applicants are now bidding more selectively
- the 'statutorily overcrowded' need was removed from the Emergency Band. There were only two applicants who were statutorily overcrowded at the time of introducing this. Their issues have now been resolved.
- applicants in C Band were assessed in date order only. There have been no issues raised either by customers or staff.

We told applicants about the changes by:

- writing to all active and under review active applicants on the housing register telling them what the changes were with a list of FAQ's.
- updating the Derby Homefinder website and added some additional FAQ's.
- producing posters for our reception.
- including information on the weekly property list that we sent to agencies and partners.
- notifying all DCC members.
- updating the Derby Homefinder Information Booklet and Banding Leaflet.
- advising all Derby Homefinder partners.

4.6 The way forward

Consultation on the Localism Act in relation to Allocations was received in January 2012. The allocation provisions in the Localism Act 2011 came into force on 18 June and the new social housing allocations guidance was published on 29 June. These give the authority the freedom to determine who can qualify to go on the housing register and maintain the protection for the vulnerable provided by the statutory 'reasonable preference' criteria. We had already prepared for these changes and consulted with the Derby Homefinder landlords in April 2012 on our draft proposals for a new policy. Our ICT requirements are now being developed with our software providers. A policy is being drafted and consultation with members, customers, stakeholders and landlords will take place towards the end of September. We aim to submit the allocations policy for Cabinet approval in October 2012, and introduce the new policy no later than March 2013. We will need to take account of statutory instruments that will be introduced regarding former Armed Forces Personnel.

4.7 Subject to Cabinet approval, we anticipate that the main changes to the policy will be:

- Daily advertising.
- A change from 4 bands to 2. That is an Emergency Band for statutorily homeless applicants and a Housing Needs band. The housing needs band would take account of 'community contribution' and the impact of the welfare reform changes on under occupying for working age social housing tenants.
- Changes to the eligibility table to take account of the welfare reforms changes re eligible bedroom size.
- Advertising difficult to let properties through advertising on an 'Open to All' basis.
- Introducing 'Non qualifying' persons. That is no longer having an open housing register. Under the Localism Act we can restrict eligibility in terms of who we will accept onto the housing register.
- Give a 'need' for Ex Armed Forces personnel.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

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| Legal officer | None |
| Financial officer | None |
| Human Resources officer | None |
| Service Director(s) | Brian Frisby |
| Other(s) | Lisa Callow (Author) |

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| Background papers: | None |

Appendix 1

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| IMPLICATIONS |
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Financial and Value for Money

1.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Legal

2.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Personnel

3.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Equalities Impact

4.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Health and Safety

5.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Environmental Sustainability

6.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Asset Management

7.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Risk Management

8.1 There are no implications arising from this report

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

9.1 There are no implications arising from this report

