

## **HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

**10 JUNE 2019**

### **COUNCIL HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME – ANNUAL UPDATE**

#### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 To provide the Committee with its annual update on the application of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme and to recommend some minor amends to the Scheme for Committee approval.

#### **2.0 Background**

2.1 As part of its previous work programme, this Committee oversaw a detailed review of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme, which was launched in April 2017.

2.2 At its meeting on 11 June 2018, the Committee received its annual update on the scheme and the impact of the amendments made. An Urgency Item – Minute of Decision was also presented on 11 June 2018 which advised that the urgency procedure was required to enable further amendments to the Scheme to support the implementation of the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which went live in April 2018.

2.3 On the 11 March 2019, the Committee received and approved the recommendations contained in a report which proposed further changes to the Scheme to ensure the housing elements of the Nottinghamshire Local Offer for Care Leavers (approved by Policy & Finance Committee on 21 February 2019) could be delivered in Newark & Sherwood.

#### **3.0 Annual Update**

3.1 The Council's Housing Allocation Scheme is implemented on the Council's behalf by Newark and Sherwood Homes under the existing Management Agreement.

3.2 The current version of the Scheme went live in July 2018, following the successful implementation of the amendments for the Homelessness Reduction Act.

3.3 Having operated the updated policy for three successive quarters Newark and Sherwood Homes have conducted an analysis of the amendments, including those approved as part of the review in April 2017 and sought to measure the impact these changes have had. Attached at **Appendix A** is a copy of their impact report.

#### **Banding and Lettings Data**

3.4 The table below shows the number of applicants, by their bandings that were registered for housing at the end of quarter 4 2018/19.

	<b>Total number of Applicants by end of Quarter 4 2018/19</b>
Number of Applicants on register	3373
Applicants in Band 1	157
Applicants in Band 2	341
Applicants in Band 3	1015
Applicants in Band 4	1860

- 3.5 In addition to the number of applicants on the housing register below are details of the number of allocations that Newark and Sherwood Homes have made throughout 2018/19.

	<b>Total number of Lettings for 2018/19</b>
Total Lettings	441
Lettings to Band 1	87
Lettings to Band 2	197
Lettings to Band 3	124
Lettings to Band 4	33

- 3.6 100% of all lettings made in 2018/19 had a local connection to the District which is consistent with that of previous years.
- 3.7 A quarterly breakdown of all of these figures can be found at **Appendix B**.
- 3.8 The overarching feedback from this assessment is that the majority of the changes are creating positive improvement and are achieving their desired outcomes. There are some amendments to the scheme, such as the Right to Move Regulations and Fostering/Adoption where the impact and outcomes cannot be measured at this time as there have not been applicants who fulfil these criteria. Both of these are legal requirements and therefore will remain within the policy and ongoing monitoring of the Scheme will continue.
- 3.9 To provide assurance to Members, and in accordance with the Scheme, there is a cross Council and Company Officer Group that meets quarterly to regularly review the Allocations Scheme to ensure its requirements are being implemented and that it continues to meet relevant legislation and any new duties placed upon the Council.

#### Registration Online

- 3.10 Since 4 April 2019, those looking for a new home have been able to complete an application to join the housing register, view available properties and register interest in a property online through the Newark and Sherwood Homes website.
- 3.11 The new streamlined approach keeps pace with the majority of services now being delivered online, is more accessible, interactive and efficient as well as being environmentally friendly by reducing the use of paper applications.
- 3.12 Once an applicant has created an account, they are able to review their application details, upload supporting documents and register their interest in properties that match their needs.
- 3.13 Further improvements currently being considered include a facility for applicants to update on any changes to their circumstances and a facility to renew applicant's details on a regular basis.

#### **4.0 Proposed Minor Amends**

4.1 The cross Council and Company Officer Group have identified that further changes are required to the Scheme and recommend that the following minor amendments are made to ensure the Scheme remains legally fit for purpose and addresses local need requirements. Given that these are minor updates to the existing Scheme and not considered significant changes, there is no requirement for statutory consultation. Detailed below is a short overview of the proposed amendments:

- Eligibility Criteria – amendments to the wording to reflect a legislation change sent through by Government in relation to EEA family members;
- Local Connection - amendments to the wording to ensure the text better explains family member connection and to ensure that the wording from the Homelessness Reduction Act is included;
- Financial Resources – amendments to the wording to ensure applicants understand the tests applied to their application and information required;
- Review of Decision to Exclude from the Allocation Scheme – wording amendment to reflect current practice and clarify process;
- Medical Circumstances – additional section being added to cover very complex cases which are not covered by other aspects of the policy to ensure proper process and fair assessment of all applicants;
- Penalties – additional wording be added to explain what happened to applicants who have received a suspension, have been reinstated and then go on to refuse a further offer of accommodation;
- Suitability Criteria – amendments to categories to ensure the policy reflects day to day practice, it legally fit for purpose and enables the Council and Company to make best use of its stock;
- No Fixed Address – a new category to support the introduction of the Rough Sleepers Strategy to ensure fair assessment and accurate implementation of the legal requirements;
- Effective and Efficient – amendments to the wording to enable better use of stock and process where an applicant’s circumstances cannot be met under any other relevant category of the policy.

4.2 An updated Housing Allocations Scheme, which incorporates the proposed amends is attached at **Appendix C** for the Committee’s approval.

#### **5.0 Equalities Implications**

5.1 No equalities implications have been identified from the Equalities Impact Assessment carried out by Newark and Sherwood Homes which takes into account the specific needs of persons with protected characteristics to ensure the Council’s responsibilities under the Equalities Act 2010 have been fully considered and met.

#### **6.0 Financial Implications – FIN19-20/7654**

5.1 It is not expected that any of these amendments should have any financial implication however, if there are any associated costs with these proposals they will be contained within the Council’s allocated revenue budgets.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:**

- (a) Members note the contents of this report which provides an annual update on the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme**
- (b) the proposed minor amendments and draft Scheme (attached at Appendix C) be approved.**
- (c) delegated authority be given to the Director - Communities & Environment to approve any further minor amends required that do not require formal consultation, to ensure the Scheme continues to adhere to statutory requirements.**

### **Reason for Recommendations**

**To ensure the Council has a fit for purpose Housing Allocations Scheme which is a statutory requirement under the Housing Act 1996.**

### **Background Papers**

Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 – available from <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2019/861/contents/made>

Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities – available from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

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