

Body: Cabinet

Date: 31st March 2010

Subject: Revised Housing Allocations Policy

Report Of: Ian Fitzpatrick, Senior Head of Community

Ward(s) All

Purpose: To update Members in relation to the Council's updated Allocations Policy and seek approval for its adoption.

Decision Type: Key Decision

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Notes the proposed revised Allocations Policy
2. Approves the adoption of the new policy in support of the council joining the sub-regional Homemove choice-based lettings scheme in June 2010.

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1.0 Background/Introduction

1.1 In October 2008 Cabinet approved the principle of the council joining the established Sussex Homemove choice-based lettings scheme.

1.2 The advantages of joining this sub-regional scheme are:

- A successful grant bid to fund the set-up costs.
- The alignment of our lettings process with other nearby local authorities to ensure equality for all residents across the sub-region.
- A more accessible service that will help people to better find the housing solution that best meets their needs and resources.
- Higher quality performance management information and analysis of local housing need.

1.3 Eastbourne has a significant advantage over the other partner authorities because as one of the original pilots for choice-based lettings our applicants and our staff are already familiar with the way the system works. There are therefore relatively minor alterations required to our

policy to align it with the Sussex Homemove scheme.

- 1.4 In the interests of economy the full revised Allocations Policy is not attached but copies have been sent to members of the Cabinet and lead Opposition members, placed in the Members Room, at the Town Hall Reception, and on the Council's website at <http://www.eastbourne.gov.uk/council/meetings/cabinet>. Copies are also available on request. This report summarises the key points and highlights the main changes and improvements compared with our existing policy.

2.0 Key changes within the new policy

2.1 Applications

- 2.1.1 In addition to the traditional application methods customers will also be able to apply on line. This will support the council's ambition for wider E-communication and paperless transactions.

2.2 Labelling properties

- 2.2.1 The new scheme operates a system of easily understood icons so that customers can see at a glance whether a property is suitable for their needs. These include:

	This icon indicates the number of bedrooms in a property.
	This icon denotes the minimum and maximum number of people who can live in a property.
	A symbol showing a wheelchair with the number '1' indicates that the property has full wheelchair access both inside and out.
	A wheelchair with the number '2' indicates that the property has some adaptations and is accessible to people with walking difficulties that may use a wheelchair for part of the time.
	A wheelchair with the number '3' indicates that the property may have some minor adaptations and is suitable for a person who has limited mobility but can manage one or two stairs.

- 2.2.2 These icons will be used when advertising our properties to ensure that applicants bid for suitable properties. This will help to reduce the number of inappropriate bids that can lead to increased void times.

2.3 The banding structure

- 2.3.1 As with our existing HomeChoice scheme, the new Homemove scheme places applicants into one of four bands that reflect the urgency of their need to move. However, this assessment is more fine-tuned than for our current process, particularly in the grading of medical issues and disabilities.

2.3.2 A summary of the key differences in the banding systems is shown below:

Existing policy: Band 1	New policy: Band A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepted homeless households who are owed a housing duty by the council • Tenants of the council or a RSL who are prepared to vacate a family house by moving to a smaller property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepted homeless households who are owed a housing duty by the council • Tenants of the council or a RSL who are prepared to vacate a family house by moving to a smaller property • People with high medical priority • Households who are statutorily overcrowded • Transfer applicants needing permanent or temporary decant • properties with a category 1 hazard as advised by Environmental Health and where there is an imminent risk to the tenant or it would be unreasonable for the tenant to remain in the property whilst remedial works were carried out • Releasing an adapted property or to make best use of accessible stock • Move on from care or supported housing • Priority transfer e.g. extreme harassment • Severe exceptional circumstances and/or cumulative needs, which warrant emergency priority
Existing policy: Band 2	New policy: Band B
<p>Households with 2 or more of the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless • Overcrowding • Medical need to move • Welfare need to move 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe overcrowding: lacking 2 or more bedrooms • Successors and non-statutory successors to a tenancy • Transfers on management grounds • People with a medium medical priority • Ex-tenants returning from an institution e.g. rehabilitation where such a commitment has been made • People with children who are living in insecure housing such as staying with family or friends
Existing policy: Band 3	New policy: Band C
<p>Households with 1 or more of the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless • Overcrowding • Medical need to move • Welfare need to move, e.g. people who need to move in order to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate overcrowding: lacking 1 bedroom • Accepted homeless households occupying temporary accommodation on an Assured Shorthold or Non-Secure tenancy • People who need accommodation to assist in delivering a care plan • Low medical priority

give or receive care and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Households lacking a kitchen or internal bathroom and WC Households experiencing substantial disrepair in their current accommodation Applicants for sheltered housing with no identified care needs People who need to move in order to give or receive care and support
Existing policy: Band 4	New policy: Band D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants with no housing need Owner occupiers or other households with substantial amount of savings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants with no housing need Owner occupiers or other households with substantial amount of savings

2.3.3 This more sophisticated banding policy will enable higher priority to be given where people have exceptional or cumulative medical needs, or where applicants have particular circumstances which were not specifically recognised under the existing scheme. This means the new policy is more transparent and banding decisions will be easier for applicants and other agencies to understand.

2.4 **Bidding for properties**

2.4.1 Applicants will continue to bid for properties as they do under our current policy. However, applicants will for the first time be able to bid on line and by text as well as by post, telephone and personal visit to the Contact Centre.

2.4.2 The new policy will continue to provide an Assisted Bidding service for vulnerable households who are less able to check for suitable properties and bid for themselves.

2.5 **Advertising properties**

2.5.1 At present properties are advertised to applicants in a specific band which is determined by officers. Under the new policy properties will generally be let strictly in accordance with the priority of need to ensure that valuable housing resources are used in the most effective way possible.

2.5.2 Officers will however retain the discretion to target certain properties to individual bands or client groups in order to address specific issues. For example, it may be decided to prioritise households with a track record of good tenancy management in order to create stability in a newly built housing scheme.

2.5.3 The new policy will retain the manager's discretion to bypass the choice-based lettings procedure to allocate certain properties such as those with very specific adaptations or flats in a specialist scheme for particularly vulnerable people. Where appropriate the Officer Panel of staff from

council's Housing Services team and Eastbourne Homes will select the most appropriate tenant for these special properties to ensure the best use of these limited resources.

3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 The new policy has been developed by a working group comprising officers from the council's Housing Services team, Eastbourne Homes and Raglan Housing Association.
- 3.2 Wide consultation has taken place with council tenants through workshops and presentations at the EHL Tenants Conferences in 2008 and 2009. Presentations and discussions have also taken place at a range of meetings and forums with partner agencies including the multi-agency Housing Forum, Housing Management Forum, and the Eastbourne Housing Partnership.
- 3.3 Housing applicants were invited to complete a short questionnaire when they renewed their applications at last year's annual review of the Housing Register. A more comprehensive advice leaflet will be handed to applicants at this year's review in April and staff will be on hand in the Contact Centre to answer any individual questions.

4.0 Resource Implications

4.1 Financial

- 4.1.1 There are no financial implications associated with the new policy. Start-up costs for the new Homemove scheme have been funded by a one-off grant from CLG and although ongoing expenses, such as advertising costs, are still to be finalised it is anticipated that ongoing running costs in subsequent years can be funded from existing budgets.

4.2 Staffing

- 4.2.1 There are no staffing implications arising from this report. It is anticipated that the new policy can be implemented by existing staff.

5.0 Other implications

5.1 Anti-poverty

- 5.1.1 This new policy will ensure that scarce affordable housing resources are targeted to people in the greatest need. The new lettings scheme will also include the facility for households to apply and bid on line for free, thus avoiding the expense of postage, telephone calls of travelling to the Contact Centre.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The new Allocations Policy will deliver an enhanced service to our customers by:

- Improving and extending the ways in which our customers can apply to the housing register and bid for suitable new homes.
- Providing a more sophisticated assessment process that will ensure that additional priority is given to applicants with severe or multiple housing and health needs and thus ensure that their needs are met more quickly.
- Providing more comprehensive information about available properties including colour photographs and simple icons so that applicants can see at a glance whether a property may be suitable for their needs.
- Prioritising lettings to the highest bands to ensure that customers in the greatest housing need are given the highest priority for re-housing.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Notes the proposed revised Allocations Policy
2. Approves the adoption of the new policy in support of the council joining the sub-regional Homemove choice-based lettings scheme in June 2010.

Sue Burlumi
Housing Services Manager

Background Papers:

The Background Papers used in compiling this report were as follows:

Cabinet report 'Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Schemes', 22.10.08

Homemove User Guide (note: a revised guide will be published March 2010).

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