



Item

Social Housing Lettings Policy

To:

Executive Councillor for Housing
Housing Scrutiny Committee 22nd June 2021

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All wards

Non-key decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The City Council, along with its Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk sub-regional local authority partners, has recently carried out a review of its Lettings Policy. The Lettings Policy sets out how housing register applicants are prioritised and how Council and housing association homes across the region are allocated. A revised policy was subject to a 12-week customer and partner consultation between October and December 2020 and has subsequently been updated further to reflect some of the feedback that was received.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the revised Lettings Policy as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

3. Background

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- 3.1 In 2008 the City Council, alongside its sub-regional local authority and housing association partners, launched a choice based letting scheme for the allocation of social housing properties across the region. This scheme is known as Home-Link and, because it is sub-regional, allows for some movement of applicants between local authority districts. At the same time, a sub-regional Lettings Policy, setting out how Home-Link applicants are prioritised and properties of participating landlords allocated, was introduced.
- 3.2 The Lettings Policy has been reviewed periodically since 2008, most recently in 2018 when some changes to the banding (priority) criteria had to be introduced for homeless applicants in order to reflect the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. At that point, a very limited consultation on the policy changes took place on the understanding that the amendments would be reviewed and more widely consulted on as part of a full policy review, scheduled for 2020.
- 3.3 Accordingly, following a series of policy review meetings between representatives of the local authority partners in 2019/20, a revised version of the Lettings Policy was drafted in the summer of 2020. The revised policy was checked by a solicitor specialising in local authority housing law.
- 3.4 A public and partner consultation on the draft policy ran from October to December 2020. Overall, there were high levels of agreement for the proposed changes. The draft policy remains largely unchanged following the consultation therefore, with only a few minor wording changes agreed by the Home-Link Management Board in January 2021.

4. Summary of the proposed changes

- 4.1 Adjustments to the banding criteria, agreed in 2018 in response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, have been considered in detail and no substantial changes have been made to the 2018 amendments. The review does not seek to change the existing principles in the way that homeless applicants are prioritised, as the consensus amongst

local authority partners is that they work as effectively as they can in preventing and relieving homelessness. The review does, however, provide further clarity around some of the wording introduced in 2018.

- 4.2 In accordance with statutory guidance issued in 2020 on allocating social housing for the Armed Forces Community, ex-partners or spouses of armed forces personnel have been given the same local connection exemption as their former partners when they must move out of a Ministry of Defence property due to a relationship breakdown.
- 4.3 The revised policy incorporates changes to the definition of local connection and sets out greater clarity as to what is meant in relation to a local connection which may arise due to employment in the local authority area. Specifically, it seeks to clarify the criteria around the type and nature of qualifying work, including where the work is located.
- 4.4 The policy offers greater clarity in circumstances where an applicant has sufficient financial capital, or other means, to find a housing solution outside of the housing register. The revised wording makes it clearer that, in this situation, an assessment of 'sufficient financial resources' will override the needs assessment band but is subject to review if an applicant's circumstances change.
- 4.5 The majority of the other proposed changes relate to the clarification of wording to make it clearer what the policy actually means and to ensure that it is applied consistently across local authority partners. No changes to any of the priority 'bandings' are proposed. This sees those applicants in the highest need prioritised for housing ahead of those with less need.
- 4.6 The main aims of the policy, to provide homes to those most in need and to let council and housing association properties in a fair and transparent way, remain in place.

5. Implications

a) Financial Implications - None

b) Staffing Implications - None

c) Equality and Poverty Implications - An Equality Impact Assessment of the revised policy has been completed.

d) Environmental Implications - None.

e) Procurement Implications - The revisions to the Lettings Policy have no implications on the current contract with the Home-Link IT supplier.

f) Community Safety Implications - The lettings policy has a positive impact on community safety but the revisions do not add to it.

6. Consultation and communication considerations

6.1 A public and partner consultation on the draft policy ran from October to December 2020. A questionnaire was sent to all existing Home-Link applicants across the sub-region asking for their views on the proposed changes. Information about the review, and an invitation to complete the questionnaire, also appeared on the City Council and Home-Link websites. A significant number of partner organisations across the sub-region were also invited to comment by completing the questionnaire.

6.2 In total, 623 responses were received from across the sub-region. 48% of these were from Home-Link applicants. Additionally, a range of other people replied, including representatives from Home-Link partners and other interested organisations such as the Probation Service and domestic abuse support services. A summary of the results has been published on the Home-Link website.

6.3 Once approved, the revised Lettings Policy will appear on the Home-Link and City Council websites.

7. Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- Draft Lettings Policy for Cambridge City Council and sub-regional partners
- Equality Impact Assessment for the draft policy

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Lettings Policy

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

9. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Simon Hunt, Housing Advice Operations Manager, tel: 01223 457932, email: simon.hunt@cambridge.gov.uk