

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Subject: HOUSE EXTENSION/CONVERSIONS – QUALIFYING CRITERIA**  
**Meeting: HOUSING AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE**  
**Date: 10 November 2009**  
**Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Members are aware that there are a number of applicants on the Council's housing list living in overcrowded conditions and that the Council's ability to accommodate larger families within the housing stock is limited.
- 1.2 As part of a number of options aimed at addressing the shortfall in larger accommodation and meeting the needs of larger families, the feasibility of providing additional accommodation through house extensions or loft conversions is being explored.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to set out for Members' approval, a set of qualifying criteria for both applicants and properties to enable further consideration to be given to providing an extension or loft conversion.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Out of the housing stock of 16,384 properties, 462 have four bedrooms and only 5 properties have 5 or more bedrooms.
- 2.2 As Members are aware, under the revised Allocations Policy which will be implemented with effect from 5 January 2010, new household size criteria will be introduced. These criteria recognise that households are overcrowded if two members of a household over 8 years of age (other than a couple) are sharing a bedroom. Two levels of priority are available depending on the degree of overcrowding – Band One priority is awarded where the household requires two or more additional bedrooms to meet the household size criteria. Band Two priority is awarded where one additional bedroom is required to meet the household size criteria.
- 2.3 In addition, those living in properties which are too large for their needs will receive greater priority under this policy.
- 2.4 As part of the preparation for transition to the new policy, all applicants on the housing list are being contacted to gather additional information required. This includes information to assess priority based on overcrowding. The opportunity is also being taken to ask those applicants who are Council tenants whether they would still wish to move if it were feasible to extend their existing home. This will enable the likely demand for house extensions/conversions to be assessed.
- 2.5 In conjunction with implementation of the new allocations arrangements, work is also in progress to extend and improve Housing Options advice available to the public. Such advice will assist applicants to consider options, other than Council housing which may be available to address their housing needs e.g. private sector renting, shared equity schemes.

### **3. QUALIFYING CRITERIA**

#### **Applicant Qualifying Criteria**

- 3.1 Where tenants indicate that their reason for moving is overcrowding only, loft conversion or house extension may be considered for those who:
- Live in a 3 bedroom property and require two additional bedrooms to meet their household's needs **or**
  - Live in a 4 bedroom property and require one or two additional bedrooms to meet their household's needs.

#### **Property Qualifying Criteria**

- 3.2 It is proposed that extension/conversion will only be considered where 3 or 4 bedroom properties can be extended/converted to provide at least one additional bedroom. The range of issues that require to be considered to help determine whether a property is suitable for conversion will include:
- The existence of common services or access requirements that prevent an extension to the building or development in the roof space.
  - Whether there are ownership / shared ownership responsibility issues that may prevent an extension to the building or development in the roof space.
  - Whether the current roof configuration has sufficient space to allow development.
  - Whether the layout of the property below the roof space has sufficient space / flexibility to allow access to a roof space development.
  - Is the structure of the roof suitable for conversion, or would it require to be re-engineered or replaced?
  - Is the property of non-traditional construction which may prevent extension or conversion?
  - Will the extended or converted property gain the space required, considering the inevitable loss of usable space on the floor below the roof space?
  - Does the cost of carrying out the extension or conversion reflect best value for the Council?
- 3.3 To adequately address these considerations an individual appraisal will be necessary for each proposed conversion which would offer guidance on the overall feasibility of the conversion, the space gained from the conversion and the anticipated costs involved.

### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There will clearly be financial implications in providing a scheme for extending/converting properties. From previous technical assessments undertaken costs are expected to be upwards of £30,000 per property and it will be necessary to set aside a proportion of resources. Further consideration can be given to the funding of the programme once demand for the scheme has been assessed and appropriate means of securing the required funding have been explored. This will be set out in a future report to Members prior to the budget process for 2010/11 being finalised in February 2010.

- 4.2 Members should also note that the rental and Council Tax charges to the tenant may be increased as a result of extending/converting a property and there will be implications with regard to cost floor levels should the tenant subsequently exercise their Right to Buy the property.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Committee is requested to:**

- 5.1 Approve the qualifying criteria for inclusion in an extension/conversion programme set out for both applicants and properties in Sections 3 above; and
- 5.2 Note that a further report will be brought to Members setting out the likely demand and resources required to provide a scheme of extension/conversion of properties to meet the needs of larger families.

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**DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

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Contact Name: Liz MacEwen, Service Manager Ext 0786  
David Dunbar, Service Manager Ext 0833