

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: ALLOCATIONS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 9TH DECEMBER 2009
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will recall the report to Housing & Social Services Committee on 9 December 2008 which asked Members to agree the Council's Allocation Policy as set out in Appendix 1. The report noted the proposal to bring further reports to Members setting out a timetable for transition to the new policy subject to the implementation of the Integrated Housing Management System (IHMS)
- 1.2 Members will also recall that at the meeting on 11 August 2009, Policy and Resources Committee agreed the recommendation to accept the tender from Capita to provide an IHMS with the allocations module planned to go live in January 2010. The purpose of this report is to:
- provide details of the transition to the new allocation arrangements;
 - set out in further detail and seek approval of arrangements for allocating adapted houses and Housing with Care; and
 - seek approval to re-categorises properties currently designated as Housing for the Elderly as either Level 3 Housing with Care or mainstream housing.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF IHMS

- 2.1 A small project team has been established to work with Capita to implement the IHMS system. Based at Seabegs Road Bonnybridge, the team has initially focused on cleansing data contained on the existing allocations system prior to transfer of this information to the Capita system. The team has also worked with allocations consultants from Capita to develop and configure the IT system to meet the requirements of the Council's revised Allocations Policy and the team has received training in the operation and administration of the Capita system. To date, two successful transfers of housing applicant details have been carried out and systems testing using this data is now in progress.
- 2.2 The final transfer of applicant details to the Capita system will take place in early December to allow data testing to be completed prior to the system going live on 5 January 2010. From that date, vacant mainstream properties will be advertised and allocated through Choice Based Lettings.

3. INFORMATION FOR EXISTING APPLICANTS

- 3.1 Members are aware that we have recently written to all applicants to tell them about the changes to housing allocations and the implications for their housing application. At the same time, we are taking the opportunity to:
- ensure that applicants wish to be registered for housing with the Council;
 - advise applicants which applicant group they are placed in i.e Home Seeker, Home Mover or Home Starter;
 - gather additional information from applicants to allow their circumstances to be prioritised according to the revised allocations policy;
 - ensure that relevant details regarding their housing circumstances are up-to-date; and
 - advise applicants with no housing needs based on the circumstances currently recorded that their priority under the revised policy will be Band 4.
- 3.2 A reply paid envelope has been provided to enable applicants to return their response. For applicants who require further assistance, a freephone telephone service has been provided so that a member of staff can contact them directly.
- 3.3 Additional and amended information returned by applicants is being processed prior to the final transfer of data to the Capita system. A reminder letter is being sent to those applicants who have a housing need but so far have failed to respond advising that until they reply their application will be suspended for no contact and they will be unable to bid for properties.

4. LAUNCH OF NEW ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1 In addition to the letters which have been sent to all applicants currently on the housing list, the new allocations arrangements are being publicised more widely. Information is available on the Council's Website and the current editions of the tenants' newsletter "In the Neighbourhood" and the "Falkirk Council News" are carrying features on the new arrangements and a press release has been sent to the local press. The plasma TV screens in local offices/One Stop Shops and posters in appropriate Council offices and libraries will also display information.
- 4.2 The revised allocations policy and choice base letting system will be branded as "Homespot" and a new application form and information for applicants are being printed with this branding. A newsletter, carrying the Homespot branding will be produced and distributed fortnightly, to advertise the properties which are available for letting. The newsletter will be available in local offices/One Stop Shops and other appropriate Council offices and libraries. It will also be routinely distributed to partner and advocacy organisations. Details of available properties will also be listed on the Council's Website.
- 4.3 Allocations of properties using the current policy and matching process will cease at close of business on 31 December 2009. The first properties will be advertised in a cycle commencing on 13 January 2010 at 12 noon with bids for the available properties closing at 4pm on 26 January 2010. All bids received at any time between these dates will be

considered and thereafter prioritised according to the revised Allocations Policy. Vacant mainstream properties will be advertised on a fortnightly basis thereafter.

- 4.4 Applicants will be given a unique “PIN” to enable them to bid for the properties advertised in a number of ways – via the Council Website from any location with Internet access, at local offices/One Stop Shops and using a Freephone Service. PIN Numbers and details of how to bid for properties will be sent to current applicants from 5 January 2010.

5. TRAINING

- 5.1 Staff in local offices/One Stop Shops have attended briefing sessions on the new arrangements and detailed training for key frontline staff on the Capita system is programmed for early December 2009. Thereafter, training on the Capita system will be rolled out across Neighbourhood Services as appropriate.
- 5.2 A demonstration of the new system will be held in January 2010 and Members will receive an invitation to this event.

6. LETTING ADAPTED HOUSING

- 6.1 Members will recall that the revised allocations arrangements did not include advertising adapted properties. Falkirk Council has a number of such properties across its housing stock and when these are available for re-letting, we seek to match them with applicants on our housing list who require such facilities. An adapted property is one that is suitable for a person with a medical condition or disability and has one or more of the following adaptations:
- A low/level access shower or wet room;
 - An external ramp or altered steps; and
 - A fully adapted and accessible kitchen
- 6.2 Detailed arrangements for prioritising applicants and matching applicants to properties which have been adapted have been developed to complement the provision of other Community Care services for people with disabilities and to take account of the national eligibility criteria. These arrangements are set out in Appendix 1. It is proposed that this Appendix be included within Section 5.3 of the Housing Allocations Policy.
- 6.3 Applicants who require adapted housing will register with the Council in the normal manner. The registration form records basic details about the applicant and their household, their housing circumstances and their housing preferences. The registration form also indicates if the applicant (or any member of their household) requires accommodation with specific adaptations such as low/level access shower or wet room, ramp or level access, adapted kitchen.
- 6.4 Where the applicant has indicated that they require adapted accommodation, their needs are assessed using the Single Shared Assessment model and eligibility criteria are applied to prioritise the urgency with which a move to adapted housing is required.

- 6.5 To match an available property, a short list of suitable applicants will be drawn up. These are applicants whose:
- needs are such that they require the adaptations available and
 - whose family complement meets the household size criteria for the property
 - whose housing preferences match the vacancy available
- 6.6 Short-listed applicants are ranked in order of eligibility criteria priority awarded. Where there is more than one applicant with the same level of priority, the applicant who has had the award of priority longest will be offered the property.
- 6.7 Where there is no adapted housing available to meet the needs of a particular applicant with eligibility criteria Priority 1 or 2, the applicant may be matched to a vacant mainstream property which is suitable for adaptation as outlined in Section 2.3 of Appendix 1.
- 6.8 It is anticipated that the comprehensive process of assessment and matching applicants to available vacancies will result in successful offers of tenancies of adapted houses. However, in an effort to ensure that adapted housing is utilised to maximum potential in terms of addressing the particular needs of applicants and complementing community care services, there is no limit on the number of offers of adapted accommodation that an applicant can receive.

7. LETTING HOUSING WITH CARE

- 7.1 Similarly, the revised allocation arrangements do not include advertising Housing with Care. Falkirk Council's Housing with Care provides accommodation which is aimed at older people who want to live independently in their own self contained home but in a socially supportive environment.
- 7.2 Housing with Care is provided at three different levels:
- 27 x Level 1 properties (Dorrator Court);
 - 230 x Level 2 properties (Salmon Court; Glenfuir and Glenbrae Courts; Tygetshaugh Court and Cottages); and
 - 106 x Level 3 properties in a variety of locations across the Council area.
- 7.3 Detailed arrangements for prioritising applicants and matching applicants to Housing with Care vacancies have been developed to complement the provision of other Community Care services for older people and to take account of the national eligibility. These arrangements are set out in Appendix 2. It is proposed that this Appendix be included within Section 5.2 of the Housing Allocations Policy.
- 7.4 To qualify for Housing with Care, applicants must normally be aged 60 or over and have support needs. Support needs are assessed using the Single Shared Assessment model and eligibility criteria are applied to prioritise the urgency with which a move to Housing with Care is required. Existing applicants for Housing with Care have been assessed using this methodology.

- 7.5 There are separate lists for each of the three levels of Housing with Care. It is proposed that when a Level 1 or 2 Housing with Care property becomes available for letting, it is matched to an applicant on the register whose needs and housing preferences match the property. Qualifying applicants will be prioritised according to eligibility criteria and matched to the property as detailed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of Appendix 2.
- 7.6 It is anticipated that the comprehensive process of assessment and matching applicants to available properties will result in successful offers of tenancies of Level 1 & 2 Housing with Care properties. However, in an effort to ensure that Housing with Care resources are utilised to the maximum potential in terms of delivering community care services and assisting vulnerable people move to appropriate housing, it is proposed that there be no limit on the number of offers of Level 1 & 2 Housing with Care that applicants can receive.
- 7.7 In respect of Level 3 Housing with Care, currently there are 106 such properties across the Council. In addition to these, there are a further 574 properties which are currently designated as “Housing for the Elderly”. These properties were originally mainstream housing and approximately 15-20 years ago, a policy decision was taken to allocate them to older people. There were two reasons for this:
- funding was available from national government to install central heating in properties occupied by older people; and
 - concern that allocating properties to young people in groups of houses that were predominantly occupied by older residents could create a range of housing management difficulties. To address these concerns, allocations in such blocks were restricted to older applicants who had a similar lifestyle to the other occupants in the block.
- 7.8 Whilst this arrangement was appropriate at the time, many of the older people who previously occupied these properties have since died or moved away and it is now considered that some of these properties are suitable to meet general housing needs. For example, a number of the properties are upper tenement flats which are not ideally suited to older people and in some cases, there are no older applicants on the waiting list.
- 7.9 There is also the need to ensure that the lettings policy takes account of the Council’s obligations under housing and equalities legislation by ensuring that there is fair and appropriate access to the housing stock. Restricting access to properties that were originally designed to meet general housing needs to one particular client group on the basis means that the Council’s policy could be subject to criticism by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Notwithstanding this, the revised allocations policy has provision for specific properties to be the subject of a local lettings initiative in appropriate circumstances.
- 7.10 In respect of the properties currently identified as Housing for the Elderly, analysis has been of the physical attributes of each individual property and current demand from older people has been carried out. From this analysis, it is proposed that 316 of the properties designated as Housing for the Elderly be re-categorised as Level 3 Housing with Care and the remaining 258 properties be made available for mainstream letting. Appendix 3 sets out in detail the proposed changes to the list of properties currently designated as Housing for the Elderly.

- 7.11 Re-categorising properties in this way will increase the number of Level 3 Housing with Care properties across the Council to 422. It is proposed that when a Level 3 Housing with Care property becomes available for letting, it should be advertised in the same way as mainstream houses through the choice-based lettings scheme. Adverts will specify that preference will be given to bids from applicants who have been assessed as requiring Level 3 Housing with Care as set out in Section 2.3 of Appendix 2. By advertising these properties, it is anticipated that awareness of this housing option will increase across our communities.
- 7.12 In accordance with the policy for letting mainstream housing, it is proposed that an applicant's priority for Level 3 Housing with Care be reviewed if there have been two instances where an applicant successfully bids for a property then refuses it.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Arrangements are well advanced for the transfer of the details of current housing applicants to the Capita IT system and for the first module of this IHMS to be operational from January 2010. This will enable the revised allocations policy and Choice Based Letting system for mainstream housing to be implemented with effect from 5 January 2010.
- 8.2 As part of the implementation of the revised allocations policy, detailed letting arrangements for adapted and Housing with Care properties have been developed. These arrangements aim to make the best use of the Council's housing stock and help those with particular needs move to appropriate accommodation in a manner which takes account of the national framework of eligibility criteria for community care services.
- 8.3 In developing these arrangements for Housing with Care, it has been recognised that properties currently designated as "Housing for the Elderly" require to be reviewed to ensure that the best use is made of the Council's housing stock and that all legislative requirements are adhered to.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is requested to:

- 9.1 **Note the progress of transition to the revised Allocations Policy and Choice Based Lettings system approved in December 2008**
- 9.2 **Note the timetable for implementation of the new allocation arrangements with effect from 5 January 2010**
- 9.3 **Approve the inclusion in the Allocations Policy the arrangements for letting adapted houses and Housing with Care as attached at Appendices 1 & 2**
- 9.4 **Approve re-categorisation of the properties listed in Appendix 3 as either Level 3 Housing with Care or mainstream housing as set out in that document.**

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Date: 17 November 2009

Ref: AAL1109

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