

EX85. Referral from the Scrutiny Committee: Report of the Scrutiny Panel – Housing Allocations

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which presented the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee following the conclusion of the Scrutiny Panel review of the Housing Allocations Policy.

The Scrutiny Committee established a Scrutiny Panel to undertake the Housing Allocations review in early 2019. The panel reported its findings to the committee on 14 November 2019.

The panel met on six occasions and heard evidence on:-

- Introduction to Housing Allocations;
- Housing Allocations – Tony Cain, Policy Manager Association of Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO);
- Falkirk's Transition to Rapid Rehousing and Housing First;
- Housing Allocations and Challenges;
- Housing Allocations Review – Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) – Presentation from Link Housing;
- Meeting with all members.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed to make the following recommendations to the Executive at its meeting of 14 November 2019, that the Executive:-

- (1) approve the following for consultation:-

Local Letting Initiative High Flats

To bring this policy more in to line with legislation it was proposed to consult on reducing the age restriction to 50. This would assist with equality issues and enhance provision for the aging population.

Local Letting Initiative New Builds

In order to maximise the opportunity for meeting housing needs, it was proposed to consult on removing the restrictions applied to new houses. This would mean all categories could apply in line with the quota systems. This should assist with the Rapid Re-housing Transitional Plan and moving applicants on from temporary accommodation.

Under Occupancy

It was proposed that consultation was undertaken on aligning the application of Band 1 priority for under-occupation with overcrowding i.e. Band 1 priority applied in cases of under occupation by 2 or more bedrooms.

It was further proposed to consult on changes to when an applicant could make an application to move when first allocated a house. It was proposed that once an applicant had been allocated a house they could not apply for a move within 12 months unless there was a significant change of circumstance that changed their housing need.

This meant if an applicant accepted a house that was too large for their current need, they could not immediately then apply for a move and be prioritised due to under occupancy.

Time limiting Priority (Band 1 Applicants)

It was proposed to consult on limiting the time applicants with Band 1 and 2 priorities in Home Mover and Home Starter categories to 3 months of non bidding. This would be from the date of them being awarded the priority banding. Once an applicant had been determined as at risk of having priority removed, a housing interview would take place to review the circumstances including the availability of appropriate housing etc. Once it had been determined that priority would be removed the applicant would be moved to Band 4 in line with other Home Seekers.

It was further proposed to consult on removing people who were on Band 3 or 4 and who had not bid within 12 months. Their application would be cancelled after 12 months of no bidding activity and removed from the housing list. Their removal did not mean they would not be able to reapply but did mean that any advantage accrued due to the time they had been on the list, would be lost. It should be noted that the length of time a person has been on the list only would matter if two applicants of equal housing need applied for the same house.

Home Seeker Category Offers

In order to minimise the time spent in temporary accommodation and the emotional impact that living in temporary accommodation had on people, there would be consultation on the number of offers Home Seekers were awarded before priority was removed. It was proposed to consult on reducing the number of offers to Home Seekers from two to one.

This could be achieved in one of two ways:-

- An applicant who was actively bidding being offered a house through the choice based lettings system, or
- An applicant being offered a direct match after 3 months of no bidding activity.

There would however be a review meeting to determine the reasons for non bidding e.g. lack of appropriate housing etc.

Housing Debt and Allocations

It was proposed to amend the policy to make it clear to tenants their obligation to address and repay their current housing debt before being made an offer of housing. This was to ensure that those who were able to pay but refused were addressed. Applicants who were suspended from the housing list for housing debt would require to be on a payment plan to address their housing debt for a 3, 6, or 9 month period, depending on the outcome of the public consultation, before being considered for re housing.

Letting Quotas

In order to fulfil obligations under the Rapid Rehousing plans, it was proposed to consult on amending the letting quotas to 50% Seeker, 25% Mover and 25% Starter. In addition any property normally considered for All Groups should be utilised for Homeless applicants as a direct match offer. The quotas would be reviewed 24 months after amendment to ensure that it was meeting the needs of applicants, and

- (2) request that the scrutiny panel along with the portfolio holder review the outcome of the consultation in regard to the recommendations prior to final consideration by the Executive.

Decision**The Executive:-**

- (1) **approved the areas recommended by the Scrutiny Committee for consultation, and**
- (2) **requested that the outcome of the consultation comes back to the Executive and that the Executive reviews the outcome of the consultation.**