

S34. Report of the Scrutiny Panel – Housing Allocations

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting the report by the Scrutiny Panel which had reviewed the Housing Allocations policy.

The Council had agreed its Scrutiny Plan for 2018 on 6 December 2017 (ref FCS7). The plan was:-

- Fly Tipping
- Anti-social behaviour
- Housing Allocation

The final review to be completed was a review of the Housing Allocations Policy. The panel had made a number of recommendations which if agreed by the committee would be sent to the Executive for consideration. If these were accepted by the Executive it would then be required to consult on the proposals. The panel had recommended that in this event, it be allowed, by the Executive, to consider the outcome of the consultation' exercise. The panel's recommendations were –

- (1) **Local Letting Initiative High Flats-** To bring this policy more into line with legislation it is proposed we consult on reducing the age restriction to 50. This would assist with equality issues and enhance provision for the aging population.
- (2) **Local Letting Initiative New Builds-** In order to maximise the opportunity for meeting housing needs, it is 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 our Rapid Re-housing Transitional Plan and moving applicants on from temporary accommodation.
- (3) **Under Occupancy** - It is proposed that consultation is 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 is further proposed to consult on changes to when an applicant can make an application to move when first allocated a house. It is proposed that once an application has been allocated a house they cannot apply for a move within 12 months unless there is a significant change of circumstance that changes their housing need. This means if an applicant accepts a house that is too large for their current needs, they cannot immediately then apply for a move and be priorities due to under occupancy.

- (4) **Time limiting Priority (Band 1 Applicants)** - It is 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 will take place to review the circumstances including the availability of appropriate housing etc. Once it has been determined that priority will be removed the applicant would be moved to Band 4 in line with other Home Seekers.

It is further proposed that we consult on removing those people who are on Band 3 or 4 and who have not bid within 12 months applications. Their application would be cancelled after 12 months of no bidding activity and removed from the housing list. Their removal does not mean they will not be able to reapply but does mean that any advantage accrued due to the time they have been on the list, will 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 apply for the same house.

- (5) **Home Seeker Category Offers** - In order to minimise the time spent in temporary accommodation and the emotional impact that living in temporary accommodation has on people, we will consult on the number of offers Home Seekers are awarded before priority is removed. We propose consulting on reducing the number of offers to Home Seekers from two to one offer of housing. This can be achieved in one of two ways:

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

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

- (6) **Housing Debt and Allocations** - It is proposed to amend the policy to make it clear to tenants of their obligation to address and repay their current housing debt before being made an offer of housing.

This is to ensure that those who are able to pay but refuse to pay are addressed. Applicants who are suspended from the housing list for housing debt for a 9 month period before being considered for rehousing.

- (7) **Letting Quotas** - In order to fulfil obligations under the Rapid Rehousing plans, it is 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 will be reviewed 24 months after amendment to ensure that it is meeting the needs of our applicants.

The Director gave an overview of the panel's work program and summarised the recommendations. The convener of the panel, Councillor Blackwood thanked the members of the panel – Councillors Balfour, Coleman, Goldie and Munro and thanked those officers who had supported the panel in its work, in particular Fiona Campbell, Stuart Ritchie, Kenny Gillespie and Laura Smith.

Councillor Blackwood described discussions between members of the panel in regard to recommendation 6 and suggested that it be adjusted from 'a 9 month period' to 'a period of up to 9 months'. Members of the panel present discussed this proposal together with a further suggestion by Councillor Coleman that it be adjusted to read 'for a period of 3,6 or 9 months depending on the outcome of the public consultation, before being considered for rehousing.' Following a lengthy discussion the panel members recommended that the text be adjusted as per Councillor Coleman's proposal.

Following a question the Director confirmed that if agreed, the committee's recommendations would be considered by the Executive on 10 December 2020 and any consultation would begin in the New Year. This would last for 6 weeks.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee agreed:-

- 1) the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel – Housing Allocations, set out in para 4.2.1- 4.2.7 in the report with an adjustment of recommendation 4.2.6 to replace 9 months with '3,6,or 9 months depending on the outcome of the public consultation';**
- 2) to refer these to the Executive for approval and further consultation; and**
- 3) to ask the Executive to allow the panel along with the portfolio holder to review the outcome of the consultation in regard to the recommendations prior to final consideration by the Executive.**