

# **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee:  
2 September 2009**

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### **Subject: Allocations Policy Review**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of the review of the Housing Allocation Policy.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1** The current Housing Allocation Policy was approved by Social Justice Committee on 8 February 2006.
- 2.2** The legal framework for the allocations policies of social landlords is set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The Act places duties on the Council (and Registered Social Landlords) in relation to who can apply for housing and the reasonable preference which should be given in the allocation of housing. Guidance issued by the Scottish Government clarifies the requirements.
- 2.3** The main features of the legal framework are as follows:
- a) the housing list must be open to all those who are aged 16 and over;
  - b) Social landlords must give 'reasonable preference' to persons who are occupying houses which are below tolerable standard; persons who are overcrowded; persons who have large families and persons who are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions. They also have to give 'reasonable preference' to homeless persons and persons threatened with homelessness; and
  - c) Social landlords must not take into account certain factors when allocating housing. These include length of residency in the area; debts except in defined circumstances; the income of the applicant and family; property ownership and residency.
- 2.4** In West Dunbartonshire the current Allocations Policy is a points system based on housing need. Applicants are placed in a single queue in points order.

### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** The Allocations Policy review has been ongoing since January 2009. The initial stage of the review was a benchmarking exercise which compared the existing policy with the policies of other Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords and Best Practice guidance.
- 3.2** An option appraisal of the various Allocations policy models was then undertaken. It was found that there is a clear link between the size of an organisation and the type of policy that is in place. 56% of landlords (both Local Authority and RSL) with diverse housing stock in excess of 6000 units use 'Groups plus Points' systems. These landlords reported that a points only system (like the present system in West Dunbartonshire) did not provide the balance of access opportunities which their organisations sought to achieve.
- 3.3** On 31 March 2009, the Allocations section along with four other housing sections participated in the 'Big Five', a service user consultation event held in Clydebank Town Hall. The Allocations Policy review was discussed at a series of workshops and arrangements were made to carry out further consultation with the registered Tenants & Residents Organisations and other stakeholder groups.
- 3.4** Initial discussions have now taken place with the two Tenants Federations, the Association of Clydebank Residents Groups (ACRG) and the Dumbarton District Housing Federation (DDHF) and seven individual Tenants & Residents Organisations. Discussions have also taken place with a wide range of partner agencies via the Homeless Forum. At these meetings, the current Allocations Policy and a summary of Best Practice guidance have been distributed. To ensure that the consultation exercise is meaningful, follow up meetings have been arranged in late August/ September 2009, when the Tenants & Residents Organisations return from their summer break. In this way, they will have been given sufficient time to fully consider the information provided.
- 3.5** To ensure that consultation is as wide as possible, three 'open' days are being arranged in Alexandria, Clydebank and Dumbarton for the first week in September. This will ensure that the wider public has an opportunity to comment on the existing Allocations Policy and any proposed changes.
- 3.6** The possibility of introducing a 'Groups plus Points' model has, to date, been initially well received by both the Tenants & Residents Organisations and other stakeholder groups. It has been recognised that this is a means of providing a more balanced access to housing for transfer applicants and those with fewer housing needs, such as newly forming households.
- 3.7** A project board made up of West Dunbartonshire Council and RSL partners are in regular discussion in relation to the ongoing development of a Common Housing Register. A review of the Council's own Allocation Policy is being carried out in tandem with the development of a common Housing Allocation Policy.

- 3.8** The proposed revised Allocations Policy will be presented to Committee in November 2009 for approval.

**4. Personnel Issues**

- 4.1** None.

**5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1** Changes to the current Allocation Policy will require amendments to our computer software. There will be a cost involved in implementing software changes and full financial implications will be included in the report to the November Committee.

**6. Risk Analysis**

- 6.1** There is potential to improve the existing Allocations system to more adequately reflect the change in the tenant base - those applying to and being housed within the social rented sector.
- 6.2** The Housing Regulator is due to undertake an inspection of housing services in November 2009. The focus of that inspection is likely to be housing management which will include consideration of policy and processes in relation to Allocations. It is therefore important that the review of the Allocations Policy is complete and appropriate arrangements for implementing proposed changes directed at improving services to the communities of West Dunbartonshire are in place. Failure to achieve this may attract criticism of the Council's performance in relation to housing services with potentially wider implications associated with the delivery of the Best Value agenda.

**7. Conclusions & Officers' Recommendations**

- 7.1** The Allocations Policy review must reflect local circumstances, broader Scotland wide policy initiatives and examples of Best Practice.
- 7.2** The local Tenants & Residents Organisations and wider stakeholder groups are being given the opportunity to comment on all potential changes to the existing Allocations Policy.
- 7.3** A further report and the draft revised Allocations Policy will be presented to Committee for consideration in November 2009.

- 7.4** Committee is asked to note the progress on the review of the Housing Allocations Policy.

**Elaine Melrose**

**Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Date: 11 August 2009**

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**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** None

**Wards Affected:** All