

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by the Executive Director of Infrastructure and Regeneration****Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee : 7 May 2014**

Subject: Housing Allocation Review**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to establish a short life Member/Officer Working Group to assist in the review of the housing allocations policy.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) establish a Member/Officer Working Group; and
- (ii) agree the membership of that Group.

3. Background

- 3.1** The Allocation Policy was last reviewed in 2010. This introduced a Group plus Points System. It took into consideration the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Scottish Housing Regulator Interim Inspection Report in 2008, as well as other relevant legislation and reports at that time.

- 3.2** Within the Policy there was a section stating the following:

“We will review the Housing Allocations Policy every three years or sooner if required. For example, we may need to review the allocations policy to comply with legislative changes. We will consult tenant, applicants and other relevant stakeholders”.

- 3.3** Work has since commenced internally on reviewing the Policy. The forthcoming Housing (Scotland) Bill 2014, which was introduced into Parliament on 21st November 2013 and is due to receive Royal Assent in Summer/Autumn 2014 and its provisions will be considered throughout the review process.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The Housing (Scotland) Bill due in Summer/Autumn 2014 includes a large number of proposals that directly relate to Social Landlords' Allocations Policies. For the first time, Social Landlords such as the Council are being given more flexibility in their Allocation Policies through the legislation that governs the allocation of their social rented properties.

4.2 Consultation on ‘Affordable Rented Housing: Creating More Flexibility for Landlords and Better Outcomes for Communities’ took place in spring 2012. In June 2013, the Minister for Housing and Welfare announced the policy proposals that will be included in the forthcoming Housing Bill. These include:

- giving Social landlords and their communities more flexibility to decide reasonable preference groups. *Scottish Ministers will determine groups that must be included;*
- Social Landlords will now be able to consider any property that an applicant or their household owns or has owned, unless it’s unreasonable for them to occupy it;
- the introduction of qualifying period for partners, family members and carers of 12 months before they can succeed to a tenancy and also for assignation, sublet and joint tenancy requests. It will also provide stronger grounds for landlords to refuse these if it results in under-occupation or the person is not in housing need;
- allowing a minimum period to be put in place before antisocial tenants are eligible for the allocation of social housing;
- allowing landlords to give SSSTs or convert SSTs to applicants and tenants who have acted antisocially in or near their home within the last 3 years; and
- requires the Court to grant an order for recovery of possession in cases where a landlord is seeking possession because a court has convicted a tenant within the previous 12 months of using the property for illegal purposes or of an offence in or near the property that is punishable by imprisonment.

4.3 At present, the Council is not able to implement these changes within the Allocation Policy as they are not yet in legislation.

4.4 This briefing proposes a clear process and associated timescale for developing and introducing a revised allocation policy which

- takes into account the revised national legislative framework;
- is sensitive to the aspirations and needs of applicants; and
- is able to take into account the profile of WDC’s housing stock.

The forthcoming legislation (likely date Autumn 2014) provides a fresh platform for consultation with fewer constraints and more flexibility to shape the policy than which would have previously been encountered.

- 4.5** As CMT is aware, some adjustments to the current allocations policy were agreed by HEED Committee in February 2014. These practically addressed specific blockages in the current system and also approved a timetable for the forthcoming comprehensive review.

That timescale was:

| Key Milestone | Timescale |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Review to take account of Housing Bill (Autumn 2014) | March - August 2014 |
| Consultation period | September 2014 - November 2014 |
| Report on review of Allocation Policy to HEED Committee | February 2015 |

- 4.6** Since then more work has been undertaken and a more comprehensive timescale with associated targets is given in 4.7 below.

It is proposed that a short life Member Officer Working Group be established to:

- take the review forward;
- to develop a new framework for housing allocation;
- to consider proposals such as choice based lettings;
- marketing plans; and
- a framework for local lettings plans.

- 4.7** The proposed timescales and milestones are shown in the table below:

| | | |
|--|--------------|----------|
| Process mapping of allocations | March 14 | Complete |
| National research into implications of new legislation | May 14 | |
| Establishing MOWG | May 14 | |
| Complete 3 x MOWG | Aug 14 | |
| Formal Tenant & Resident Consultation | Sept- Nov 14 | |
| Final Meeting of MOWG | End Nov 14 | |
| Modelling exercise | Dec 14 | |
| H + CS Committee Approval | Feb 2015 | |
| Staff Training and IT changes | Jan-Mar 2015 | |
| Re registration of applicants | March 2015 | |
| New System Live | April 2015 | |

5. People Implications

- 5.1** The review of the Allocation Policy will be managed from existing staffing resources with the Housing Strategy and Development Team.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** There will be specific costs to amend current computer software. The indicative costs are likely to be in the region of £10,000 and should be accommodated within existing budgets. Should the amendments be more far reaching than expected then a further report to the Housing and Community Committee will be produced.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** The revisions to the Housing Allocations Policy provides the potential to improve the existing Allocations system to more adequately reflect the change in the tenant base - those applying for and being housed within the social rented sector and to respond to the unintended consequences of welfare reforms.
- 7.2** It is also recognised that by ensuring that the scheduled review of the allocation policy is designed to coincide with the significant legislative change that it not only provides a fresh platform for consultation on this topic with fewer constraints and more flexibility to shape the Policy than before.

8. Equalities Impact assessment

- 8.1** No significant issues were identified in screening for potential equality impact of this review at this stage. However, a full assessment will be carried out prior to the final report which will go from this Working Group to Committee for approval.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** The review of the allocations policy will be undertaken in close consultation with Members, tenants and residents' organisations and all other interested parties. The timescale for this consultation is shown in 4.7 above.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** Having considered the Council's strategic priorities, this report contributes significantly to all five strategic priorities and specifically to improve local housing and environmentally sustainable infrastructure.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: Report to Housing, Environmental and Economic
Development Committee 5 February 2014 "Interim
Housing Allocation Policy Review"

Wards Affected: None