

**DECENT & AFFORDABLE HOMES PDG
22 MARCH 2016**

HOUSING SERVICES ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Portfolio Holder **Cllr Ray Stanley**
Responsible Officer **Nick Sanderson, Head of Housing & Property Services**

Reason for Report: Social housing is a valuable resource and the Council needs to ensure that those homes in the District which become available for letting are allocated appropriately in order to make best use of the stock. The revised Allocations Policy sets out our approach to the use of preference labels on adverts for available properties and Members are asked to agree the revised policy, which has been reviewed.

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Cabinet adopts the revised Allocations Policy

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The new corporate plan states that homes are a priority for the Council. We need to ensure that all registered providers of social housing are making best use of the housing stock. The Council has just over 3,000 units in management and it is important that they are let to those who need them the most.

Financial Implications: Social housing is a scarce resource and demand is much greater than supply. As a strategic housing authority, the Council has to make sure that registered providers make the best use of their stock in order to minimise the cost of meeting the statutory obligations to homeless people within the District.

Legal Implications: Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011) deals with the allocation of social housing.

Risk Assessment: As a landlord with retained stock, the Council has to let homes in its management in a fair, transparent and efficient way in accordance with the regulatory framework operated by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The Tenancy Standard sets out a number of expectations and failure to meet these could result in poor publicity and a lack of confidence in the Council as a landlord.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Social housing is a scarce resource. Local authorities are expected to:

- Provide support to those in greatest housing need
- Provide settled homes for people who have experienced homelessness
- Promote greater equality and clearly meet equality duties

1.2 They should also:

- make better use of the housing stock

- promote greater choice and wider options for prospective and existing tenants
- create more mixed and sustainable communities
- promote greater mobility for existing tenants
- support people in work or seeking work
- ensure that lettings are fair or considered to be fair

1.3 The Council has a duty to ensure that the social housing stock in the District is allocated to those in the most need. Available homes are allocated using the Devon Home Choice (DHC) scheme. The Council works in partnership with all the other local authorities and the other registered providers of social housing (RPs) which work in Devon to operate the DHC scheme.

2.0 **The Council's Role**

2.1 The Council is the strategic housing authority in the District and needs to ensure that all registered providers of social housing contribute to its strategic housing function and the development of sustainable communities.

2.2 As a landlord with retained stock, the Council also has to work within the regulatory framework laid down by the HCA. This requires landlords to let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way and to make best use of available stock.

2.3 Local authorities introduce choice based lettings in December 2010. The aim to create more sustainable communities by giving applicants for social housing more choice so that they could make a positive decision to live in a particular area.

3.0 **Local Lettings Plans**

3.1 Local authorities are able to use local lettings plans to meet local needs. In rural areas, such as Mid Devon, they can be used to ensure that local needs are met by ensuring that lettings in villages and on section 106 exception sites are dealt with in a sensitive way.

3.2 Section 106 agreements are planning obligations agreed between the developer and the Council and are designed to ease the impact of a new development on a local community. Such agreements are designed to help shape the new development and to ensure that there are a certain amount of homes available for local people. In most cases, the agreements are very specific and detail how the local connection to the area will be determined.

3.3 Local lettings policies can also be used to deliver a number of other outcomes. For example, to ensure that those properties suitable for those who have need of accessible accommodation are available for those people who need them the most.

4.0 **The Allocations Policy**

4.1 The new policy incorporates routine working practices which have been in operation for some time. For example, in recent years, some of the older

person's accommodation in the District has been hard to let. This is due to the fact that the aspirations of older people have changed since the accommodation was first built. As a result of this, and in order to keep void turnaround times down, these properties are sometimes offered to those over the age of 45.

- 4.2 It is important for the Council to have an allocations policy which clearly states which criteria will be used to help meet local needs. We need to ensure that our allocation procedures are transparent and that we can justify any labels used in advertisements.
- 4.3 The policy also sets out how the Council will allocate adapted properties in order to make best use of stock in the District. So, in accordance with the provisions of the Devon Home Choice scheme, the Council can advertise properties showing that preference will be given to tenants wishing to downsize.
- 4.4 The original policy was adopted in 2011. Since then, Councillors have reviewed the way in which we assess housing need and also other issues relating to DHC. As a result of their deliberations, it has been agreed the Council should continue to register those housing applicants with no housing need. Such applicants are placed in Band E and as a result of the work completed by Members of the working party, it was agreed that those cases in Band E should be reviewed. A concerted effort has been made to contact all applicants in that band to check that their applications are up to date. As a result of feedback, a number of applications have been removed from the housing register, reducing the number of cases in Band E.
- 4.5 Members of the Working Party were also concerned that housing applicants should not be able to bid for homes and then keep on refusing them if they were successful. The policy has been updated to show that their application can be suspended if they refuse three properties.
- 4.6 Under the Localism Act the Council can further restrict applicants from being included onto the register. This now includes income levels, savings and former accrued property related debts.

Contact for more Information: Mike Parker, 01884 234906

Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley