

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 3RD NOVEMBER, 2016

SUBJECT :

REVIEW OF ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING POLICY

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to:

- Outline the results of the formal consultation exercise in relation to an amended approach.
- Seeks approval to adopt a new Access to Social Housing Policy.

To consider and comment on the following issues:

Scrutiny Committee are requested to recommend to Executive Board that:

- The results of the consultation exercise are accepted.
- The draft amended Access to Social Housing Policy is approved.

REASONS:

- To ensure the amended policy reflects the results of the formal consultation exercise.
- To ensure we develop and review policies that meet local need and priorities.
- To ensure members, service users and partners are effectively engaged and consulted in the development and delivery of new policy.
- To formulate views for submission to the Executive Board/Council for consideration.

To be referred to the Executive Board/Council for decision: YES

Executive Board - 21st November, 2016

Council - 14th December, 2016

Executive Board Member Portfolio Holder:

Cllr. Linda Evans(Housing Portfolio Holder)

Directorate

Communities

Name of Head of Service:

Robin Staines

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Designations:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 3RD NOVEMBER, 2016

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING POLICY

The way social housing is allocated in Carmarthenshire is outlined in our Access to Social Housing policy (commonly known as 'The Allocations Policy'). We operate a common approach with other registered social landlords (Housing Associations) who operate within the county. This single policy in the county has the benefit of enabling us to meet our statutory requirements and targeting all social housing at our priorities.

The policy has been amended on a regular basis to try and simplify it, reflect changes to the law or reflect amended statutory guidance. However members of the Council have been frustrated with some aspects of both the policy and the way it operates on a day to day basis. Despite the proposed amendments it is doubtful that all the frustrations will disappear as the policy has to prioritise some households over others to comply with the law. This is a reflection of the imbalance in housing supply and demand and the lack of affordable housing in the county. The Council has recognised this shortfall and is laying out plans to address the issue in the affordable housing commitment.

It has been the intention that we use feedback from members where possible to drive the changes in relation to the production of a new policy document. Initial meetings with members were undertaken in early 2015. The general messages from these sessions include:

- Could the current system be simplified
- Could more priority be given to people from Carmarthenshire
- Could we give more priority to people who have lived in a particular ward
- Could we give more priority to existing tenants who want to down size and who are overcrowded
- Could we give more priority to people who work but on a low income
- Concerns about the number of households on the register
- Concerns about tenants who don't pay their rent and cause issues for their neighbours
- Concerns about members not being informed about a letting.

From the initial meetings it was clear members wanted to consider changes and amendments to our existing approach.

Further meetings were arranged to help establish the key policy issues which would be considered as part of a wider consultation exercise.

Given the context and the strong views for change, it is proposed to adopt an allocation scheme that is simpler to understand whilst easier to administer. This will be based on the following steps:

Step	Approach
Making a housing enquiry	Rather than complete an application form, the service user will be encouraged to have telephone or face to face discussion about their circumstances. For many users, social housing is not the appropriate solution. Housing Options staff can either supply or direct users to relevant and timely services. This will be confirmed in a written housing plan.
Who can join the register	Greater clarity on who can join the register IF social housing is the most appropriate solution.
The chances of getting housed	<p>A reduction and simplification of the current banding and points based system where there are two bands (replacing four) – A and B. This will also result in the removal of the points system and the chase for points. To comply with the law Band A will not change in terms of who we prioritise. It will involve those who are determined as priority need and homeless (Appendix 3 provides recent statistics in relation to homeless cases recorded). In addition it will involve those who are disabled and need to move to an adapted property. Households will then be prioritised by local connection and time on the register.</p> <p>The second band (Band B) will involve those who meet criteria which is set locally. Discussions have involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who are homeless but non priority need. • Those threatened with homelessness. • Low income families who are in employment. • People who if they or their relatives were re-housed would promote their independence and result in a reduction in homecare. • Tenants who are overcrowded and need one bedroom or more /under occupied by one bedroom or more. <p>We will register all applicants details if they require us to regardless of them meeting the criteria outlined. These applicants are only likely to be contacted if a particular home cannot be let.</p> <p>For each band there will be further priority given in the following order:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local connection with, and time spent in, Carmarthenshire.

	<p>2. Time spent in a particular area.</p> <p>3. Time on Housing Choice Register</p>
What size and type of home	Greater clarity on what individual households will be entitled to in terms of size and type.
Suspensions from the register	Greater clarity on being suspended from the register and the process for appeals.
Specific types of housing	Clarity on separate registers for disabled people, older people/sheltered housing and for local/sensitive lettings policies.
Role of members	Clarity on the role of members in the allocation process.
Amendments	Note on amending the policy and other legal requirements.
Local Lettings and Sensitive Lets	There will be a continuation with these policies

Summary Of Consultation Exercise

There have been several meetings with members to help inform the drafting of this policy document. 216 people responded to our online and telephone surveys. There have been several focused sessions with Council staff, RSL partners other partners and tenant groups. The full programme of consultation is outlined in Appendix 1.

The results of the consultation exercise have again been shared in further meetings with members prior to finalising the new proposals. Key issues arising from the consultation involve:

- 71% agreed with the priorities outlined.
- There was clear support (87%) for giving priority to people with a connection to Carmarthenshire.
- 79% felt that they should be given priority for the area which they currently live which supports the view of current applicants where 69% indicated they wanted to continue to live in the area they currently reside.
- The consensus felt that local connection should depend on an applicant living in the area for a five year period.
- 76% felt working people should be given some priority.
- 86% indicated tenants willing to downsize should be given greater priority.

These issues and the feedback collated from various meetings support the change of approach in the new policy document (Appendix 2).

Recommendations

To recommend to Executive Board that:

- The results of the consultation exercise are accepted.
- The Draft Access to Social Housing Policy (Appendix 2) be approved.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report :

Signed: **Robin Staines**

Head of Housing & Public Protection

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
YES	YES	NONE	YES	YES	NONE	NONE

1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

The proposals subject to consultation will lead to a change to our Allocations to Social Housing Policy. The policy has undergone an Equalities Impact Assessment and no significant issues were identified.

The policy focuses on meeting local housing need and supporting balanced communities. It closely aligns with supporting people to live as independently as possible in their own home and improving people's health and well being.

2. Legal

We developed these proposals with the assistance of an independent external advice and in consultation with our solicitors. As part of the consultation exercise we sought further expert legal advice.

The policy will need to meet the requirements of the Housing Act 1985, the Housing Act 1996, the Housing Act 2004, the Crime and Disorder Act 2003, the Housing Act (Wales) 2014, the Welsh Assembly Government Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness (2015).

Under S.167 (7) of the Housing Act 1996, before adapting or altering the policy the local authority will send a copy of the draft, or proposed alteration, to every housing association in the County; and ensure that those housing associations have a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposals. In addition Under S.168 (3) of the Housing Act 1996, the local authority will notify by letter, within a reasonable period and consult with those affected by a major change to the policy.

4. ICT

Changes to the current IT system will be required as the policy is implemented. This can be carried out by further developing the existing in house system.

5.Risk Management Issues

Failure to review our policy may have an impact on people's perceptions of fairness and clarity in allocating social housing. The proposals have been developed to ensure additional weighting is given to identify local priorities, as well as meeting housing need.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Robin Staines

Head of Housing & Public Protection

1.Local Member(s)

Local members have been involved in developing options for change.

2.Community / Town Council

Community and Town Councils will form part of the detailed consultation exercise.

3.Relevant Partners

Housing Associations have been consulted in relation to possible options for change. Housing Associations and other partners will be involved in the detailed consultation exercise.

4.Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations

Housing Services Advisory Panel was involved in the initial discussions on options for change. Service users, existing applicants and other organisations like Shelter will be involved in the detailed consultation exercise.

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information

List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW

Title of Document	File Ref No.	Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
Carmarthenshire County Council – Access to Social Housing Policy	Housing General Files	Council Website - Democratic Services