

# Chichester District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26<sup>th</sup> January 2021

## Review of the Housing Register and Allocation Scheme

### 1. Contacts

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### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee consider the findings of the Task and Finish Group appointed to review the Housing Register and Allocation Scheme and make any comments to Cabinet**

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The Council administers a *Housing Register* which is used as the basis for the allocation of social housing in the District. Key elements of the Housing Register, including the definition of groups to whom '*reasonable preference*' in the allocation of housing must be given, are prescribed by law, but within this framework Councils have a considerable degree of latitude to frame policies which meet its local priorities.
- 3.2 At its meeting in September 2020 OSC established a Task & Finish Group to oversee a review of the Housing Register with the intention of making recommendations on ways in which the Allocation Scheme could be improved.
- 3.3 The T&F Group met on 13<sup>th</sup> November to receive an initial presentation and, at the time of writing, is due to consider more detailed recommendations at a meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> January. These recommendations are set out in Appendix One.

### 4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1 The overriding purpose of the review is to make sure that the Council makes optimal use of the limited supply of social and affordable rented homes which are available.
- 4.2 Underpinning this the Review highlighted several key principles which our scheme needs to satisfy, namely the need to:
- Meet the Council's statutory requirements
  - Operate as fairly and transparently as possible
  - Promote efficiency in terms of administration and swift letting of empty property
  - Allocate homes in ways which support the maintenance of sustainable communities.

4.3 The Review also recognises the specific role of Registered Providers whose homes are let through the Housing Register and the need to take on board their views, as well as those of other partners and stakeholders in the implementation of change.

## 5. Proposals

- 5.1 Proposals for change involve a number of different areas. The first of these is **eligibility** for the Housing Register. Specific changes are recommended to the income and savings thresholds for applicants, along with minor changes to the criteria used to exclude applicants who have been convicted of criminal behaviour or serious breaches of tenancy conditions. The need for a **Local Connection** to Chichester District is a key element of our scheme as is, in some cases, a connection to a rural parish. The recommendations involve some minor changes to the way this operates including the removal of the need for a rural parish connection for new homes which are built as part of 'strategic housing developments'.
- 5.2 The system of **Priority Bands** lies at the heart of the allocation scheme, the key change proposed in this part of the policy involves a more targeted approach to assist former Care Leavers and Rough Sleepers. This would be based on awarding additional priority, for a ring-fenced number of nominations, to applicants as part of a managed 'move on' pathway from supported housing.
- 5.3 A number of **operational changes** to the way the application and bidding process is managed are suggested. This includes the abolition of set time limits for bidding for some categories of applicant, a facility to suspend applicants bidding in appropriate circumstances and to let properties directly, without advertising in specified circumstances. The recommendations also provide for greater use of discretion to be delegated to the Divisional Manager in exceptional circumstances.
- 5.4 There is also a need to update the allocation scheme to ensure that it clearly reflects recent government regulations in relation to specific priority areas. This applies to two areas; applicants who are victims of **domestic abuse** and the **Armed Services Covenant** which aims to ensure that those who have served in the Armed Forces are treated fairly. In practice our allocation scheme already meets these requirements in operational terms; it is simply helpful to demonstrate this more explicitly by the way the way the scheme is framed.
- 5.5 Clearly any changes to the way homes are allocated results in some applicants being prioritised at the expense of others. The aggregate effect of these changes is very difficult to determine. At a 'micro' level the effect should be that the pathway from supported housing to long term social housing should become easier. This should benefit individuals concerned whilst improving the flow of residents through the supported housing sector.
- 5.6 Prior to making changes, it is envisaged that consultation will take place with Registered Provider partners and other stakeholders in the supported housing sector as well as West Sussex County Council. Beyond this, the next step would be to revise and republish the Housing Allocation Scheme for approval by the Cabinet.

## 6. Alternatives Considered

6.1 A limited review of other Councils' housing allocations schemes has taken place and specialist advice sought from a former Government adviser.

## 7. Resource and Legal Implications

7.1 There are no resulting budgetary implications from these changes, nor any specific implications for IT or staffing.

7.2 Once completed it will be necessary to satisfy ourselves that the revised Housing Allocation scheme is consistent with current statutory requirements.

## 8. Consultation

8.1 The intention would be to conduct consultation with partners and stakeholders prior to a Cabinet Decision on changes to the Allocation Scheme.

## 9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

9.1 One of the key risks involves the need to manage the number of homeless households being placed in temporary accommodation. The ability to provide move on options for homeless households into long term housing through the Housing Register is the principal means of managing this demand and thus controlling the cost of temporary accommodation.

## 10. Other Implications

| <b>Are there any implications for the following?</b>  |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| If you tick "Yes", list your impact assessment as a background paper in paragraph 13 and explain any major risks in paragraph 9 |     |    |
|   | Yes | No |
| <b>Crime and Disorder</b>   |     | x  |
| <b>Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation</b>   |     | x  |
| <b>Human Rights and Equality Impact</b>   | x   |    |
| <b>Safeguarding and Early Help</b>  | x   |    |
| <b>General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)</b>   | x   |    |
| <b>Health and Wellbeing</b>   | x   |    |
| <b>Other</b> (please specify)   |     |    |

## 11. Appendix

11.1 Recommendations to Task and Finish Group on Housing Register & Allocation Scheme 15th January 2021.

## 12. Background Papers

12.1 Task and Finish Group Meeting Notes 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020

12.2 Equality Impact Statement

12.3 Chichester District Council Housing Allocation Scheme  
<https://www.chichester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=25981&p=0>

12.4 Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local Authorities (December 2020)  
[Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)