

Name of meeting: Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel

Date: 22/11/2022

Title of report: Kirklees Housing Allocations Policy Review 2022

Purpose of report: As requested, this report is to update Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel on the status and outcome of the commissioned review of the Kirklees Housing Allocations Policy.

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| Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards? | No |
| Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)?</u> | No |
| The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny? | Not Applicable |
| Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name | David Shepherd, Strategic Director for Growth and Regeneration. Naz Parkar, Service Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods (10.11.2022) |
| Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? | No |
| Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning? | No |
| Cabinet member portfolio | Councillor Cathy Scott |

Electoral wards affected: all. The housing register applies in all areas of Kirklees

Ward councillors consulted: Cllr Scott, Cllr Pattison, Cllr Kendrick, Cllr Khan, and Cllr Mather

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Council has carried out a review of the housing allocations policy with support from Housing Quality Network (HQN) – an external consultancy with specific expertise on allocations commissioned by the Council. The review commenced in December 2021.

The two primary reasons for the review were:

- The policy was last comprehensively reviewed following the Localism Act, 2011, though there have been a number of more recent minor amendments because of, for example, changes in national guidance
- The balance between need for and supply of social housing has become extremely challenging - as of the end of November 2021, there were over 19,200 households on the register (compared with 11,000 in 2018) and the number of lettings per year by the Council and through nominations to housing associations is only approximately 1,800.

As a result, the probability of a household on the register being offered a property within 12 months is approximately 15 per cent. For households in the lowest bands (as set out in the allocations policy), the figure is 2 per cent. The following provides a breakdown of the housing register as of Nov 2021,

TOTAL no of applicants on housing register – 19, 233

Number of lettings per year (3 yr rolling avg) – circa 1,700

Band A – 92 applicants (less than 1%) – likelihood of success within 12 months – 77%

Band B – 1,253 applicants (7%) – likelihood of success within 12 months – 59%

Band C – 5,593 applicants (29%) – likelihood of success within 12 months – 14%

Band D – 8,792 applicants (46%) – likelihood of success within 12 months- 1-2%

Band E – 3, 457 applicants (18%) – likelihood of success within 12 months – less than 1%

Note figures are Nov 2021 but the number on the register vary around this figure.

The review, therefore, has investigated how best to ensure that households with the greatest housing needs are able to access social housing. At the same time, consideration is being given on how to realistically manage the expectations of households who are unlikely to be rehoused through the allocations system.

- 1.2 The first stage of the review undertaken by HQN focussed on three issues: (i) analysis of the current policy, (ii) review of data and information and (iii) the views of stakeholders including existing and future tenants.

- 1.3** The analysis of the current policy highlighted that it needs to be updated to take account of recent national guidance. Nevertheless, the format and style of the policy meets good practice.
- 1.4** There was a mixed response from the small sample of households. Unsurprisingly, households that had been successful through the allocations system were positive about the process even when they had been on the register for a number of years. In most cases, these were households in bands A and B. However, a few customers were not aware of basic information on the social housing stock, and on the current state of the social housing market. This resulted in frustration with the allocations system and unrealistic expectations. Some of these customers were, in addition, unclear about the allocations process.
- 1.5** The second stage of the review following HAB on the 24th May concentrated on two main outstanding items of discussion, namely the future of the lower bands on the register and 'age designation.
- 1.6** Following discussions on the future of bands, particularly Bands D and E it was agreed at Portfolio Briefing on the 23rd August 2022 to continue with all the existing bands.
- 1.7** Age designation has been discussed in various forums. Consideration has been given to the tools available within the existing Housing Allocations Policy and the local lettings framework. The local lettings framework also introduced in 2019 a sensitive lettings approach. This affects the letting of properties that are being re let following serious cases of anti-social behaviour or neighbour nuisance. The sensitive lettings approach was evaluated in February 2022 and agreed to continue.
- 1.8** Greater use of local lettings plans (as part of the Local Lettings Framework) together with the continuation of sensitive lettings is considered the preferred option to re-introducing a blanket age designation approach. This gives greater flexibility to consider specific issues on Streets, areas, blocks of homes or neighbourhoods etc.
- 1.9** The local lettings framework can be found on the following link
<https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/housing/pdf/local-lettings-framework.pdf>
- 1.9** A full schedule of the changes to the refreshed housing allocations policy can be found in appendix A
- 1.10** The current allocation policy designates all one-bedroom bungalows people over 60 years old or, people with an assessed medical need for level access accommodation or, people who are under-occupying their home by 2 or more bedrooms. The refreshed policy is making no changes in this respect.

2. Information required to take a decision

- 2.1** This update report is for information. As a result of the review, no major changes to the policy are proposed and the officer recommendation to the Cabinet Member is to strengthen the use around local lettings and sensitive lettings which are minor changes. Minor changes to the policy are delegated to the Service Director's in consultation with the portfolio holder.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Working with People

HQN conducted 26 individual stakeholder interviews and 8 group discussion sessions which were based on a semi-structured format. The discussion sessions included a meeting of the Tenants Grants and Advisory Panel and a report to the panel on the 24th May 2022. In addition, HQN carried out 16 detailed online or telephone interviews with households that had either been rehoused through the allocations system or were on the housing register.

3.2 Working with Partners

No changes are required, the current policy supports working with Registered Providers to allocate properties through the Choice Based Lettings system.

3.3 Place Based Working

The system is a choice-based lettings system so people can place bids in areas that suit them.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

Not applicable

3.5 Improving outcomes for children

Making better use of the existing policy to meet corporate objectives, for example in cases of Multi Systemic Therapy Family Integration Transition (MST-FIT).

Note - Multi Systemic Therapy Family Integrated Transition (MST-FIT) is an adaptation of MST and is aimed at bringing young people (typically aged 11-17) home from care.

3.6 Financial Implications for the people living or working in Kirklees

None

3.7 Other (eg Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)/Legal/Financial or Human Resources) Consultees and their opinions

An integrated Impact Assessment has also been completed with the outcome that a stage 2 assessment is not required.

4. Next steps and timelines

For the final refreshed version of the Kirklees Housing Allocations Policy to be shared and published. This will coincide with minor changes to the IT system being made and finalised which is currently under discussion with the IT provider. This is likely to be around February 2023.

5. Officer recommendations and reasons

The Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel receive this update on the outcome of the commissioned review into the Kirklees Housing Allocations Policy.

6. Cabinet Portfolio Holder's recommendations

Minor changes to the policy can be considered and agreed by the Service Director with responsibility in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio with responsibility. This was agreed at Portfolio Holder Briefing on the 23rd August 2022.

7. Contact officer

Paul Howard, Acting Head of Housing, Housing Services
Michelle Anderson-Dore, Head of Housing Management and Partnerships,
Homes and Neighbourhoods

8. Background Papers and History of Decisions

None

9. Service Director responsible

Naz Parkar, Service Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods,
Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director for Development

Appendix A

| Section | Topic | Basic details of the changes |
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| Contents page | 'Specialist needs' replaced by 'specialist and supported accommodation' | More appropriate title |
| Section one | Introduction | Sets out the statutory basis for allocations including listing the codes of guidance |
| Section two | Impact of the lack of social housing | New section highlights the limited availability of social housing including the likelihood of being offered a property by band and property size (based on data at the end of 2021) Emphasizes that households on the register should be proactive in relation to allocations and lettings |
| Section three | Aims and objectives | Additional detail provided on explaining each of the aims |
| Section four | Allocations process | New section incorporating a diagram of the basic allocations process |
| Section six | Eligibility | New section that explicitly summarises the issue of 'eligible persons' in the regulations |
| Section seven | Qualification | Brief section that highlights that the Council has an open housing register |
| Section eight | Banding | Table format |
| Section eight | Banding tables | |
| | B.7. Overcrowding | Although considered, no changes are made to this banding – guidance / legal cases indicate that (i) reasonable preference status applies |

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| | | to statutory definitions of overcrowding as well as broader definitions and (ii) whilst some local authorities struggle to define different degrees of overcrowding this isn't the situation locally. |
| | B.8. Victims of domestic abuse | Takes account of updated Code of Guidance: Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse (January 2022) |
| | B.9. Home loss Band | New Band 'B9', Home Loss (Kirklees Council tenants) added. This is to reflect the decision agreed at Cabinet regarding awarding Band B to tenants in the Berry Brow decant programme and can also be applied to potential future schemes as necessary. |
| | C.7. Households living in insanitary or unsatisfactory conditions | This is a statutory reasonable preference category that is not explicitly covered in the existing policy |
| Section nine | Bedroom eligibility | Bedroom eligibility section in choose 'n' move in the existing policy has been introduced as a separate section |
| Section ten | Management lets | This has been extended to include exceptional circumstances to enable the council to better support for example children leaving the care system to return home (MST-FIT). |
| Section ten | Placing bids for Band A and B | This has changed to provide the option of officers placing bids for Band A and for all Band B not just certain categories of Band B. Clearer for customers. |
| Section twelve | Local Lettings Plans | This was referred to in the existing policy however, following consultation with various groups it was requested that this be explained more fully. Local lettings plans can be introduced to a block of properties, a street or a neighbourhood where there is evidenced behaviours that typically younger tenants and their lifestyles |

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| | | affect the quiet enjoyment of other residents in the vicinity. |
| | Mutual Exchange and Succession | The current approach in the policy will become appendices to the refreshed allocations policy. |