

## SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Report of:** Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health and Executive Director - Place

**To:** Cabinet Tuesday, 12 March 2019

**(Author:** Jason King Housing Landlord Services Manager)

**Subject** Review of Housing Allocations Policy

**Purpose:** To advise Members of the consultation process required to amend the Council's Housing Allocations Policy and to seek approval to begin this process, implementing a new policy.

### **Recommendation(s):**

- 1) That Cabinet approve this report outlining the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy subject to consultation with affordable housing partners.
- 2) That Cabinet approve the implementation of the revised Housing Allocations Policy from April 2019 subject to consultation.

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 On 20 February 2018, the Policy Development Panel considered the Council's Housing Allocations Policy and raised a number of concerns. These can be summarised as follows
- That there are circa 350 households on the register, which was a relatively low number compared to other Lincolnshire district councils.
  - That the current Policy does not reflect the needs of the district having not been reviewed in 2016 when originally planned.

Recognising these concerns, this review has now been undertaken with a number of changes being identified and, subject to Members approval, will go out to the relevant partner organisations for consultation before being fully implemented from April 2019. In addition to this Policy review, work is being undertaken to enable the Council's current housing software to host online housing register applications.

Policy changes were presented to the Policy Development Panel on 19 September 2018 and feedback has been included and reflected in this report and the draft policy. The key changes to the revised policy (attached at Appendix A) are outlined below:

- The housing application process at 7.1 of the Policy, the transition to self-management through the online application process
- Qualifying residency restrictions at 8.2.2 of the Policy, a reduction in qualifying periods
- Sheltered accommodation at 8.2.5 of the Policy, bringing in a lower age limit for automatic qualification
- Number of offers made to applicants at 18.1 of the Policy, reducing number of property offers made.

It is noted that the Housing Allocations Policy is an important document in meeting the housing needs of the district and regular reviews are important to ensure the Policy works

effectively. Reviews of the Policy may be brought forward to reflect the requirements of legislative changes or changes within the housing needs of the district.

Having reviewed the current policy, the purpose of this report is to present to Members the changes that are considered appropriate to meet the following objectives

- To provide a single point of access to affordable housing in the district
- Create a simpler system to use
- Applicant self-management and responsibility for their application.

## 2.0 **OPTIONS**

2.1 That Cabinet approve the implementation of the revised Housing Allocations Policy from April 2019 subject to consultation- recommended.

2.2 Continue to operate under the existing Housing Allocations Policy- not recommended. (Do nothing.)

## 3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

3.1 The key changes determined through the review are about refocusing the policy to a vision of ensuring allocations for the “Right Person, Right Place, Right Time and at the Right Price”. The objective is to introduce changes that will create a simpler system to use, an emphasis on applicant self-management encouraging responsibility for their housing application and the encouragement for people to take an informed, measured and long term view of their housing options.

3.2 It is also about seeking to bring about a more balanced approach to allocations and meeting housing need through partially relaxing qualification criteria to the housing register and therefore capture more housing need whilst at the same time streamlining through digitalising the process and reducing the number of offers made to applicants.

## 4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

4.1 The revised Policy is expected to support the Councils digital agenda by encouraging applicants to self-serve. The partial relaxation of residency periods and age qualification criteria for sheltered accommodation is intended to increase the number of applicants on the housing register.

## 5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

### 5.1 **Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues**

5.1.1 There will be a minor requirement to post letters out to social housing partners. This is unlikely to have a significant impact. Moving to online housing applications from the current paper based form will reduce the environmental impact of this function.

### 5.2 **Constitutional & Legal**

5.2.1 Housing Landlord policies are an executive function and therefore the responsibility of Cabinet. S166A of the Housing Act 1996 requires local housing authorities to consult on major changes to its allocations policy. Appropriate consultation will be undertaken for the classification of these changes with Social Housing partners subject to approval of this Policy.

### 5.3 **Corporate Priorities**

- 5.3.1 There is a strong link between the Housing Allocations Policy and our corporate priorities, notably 'to have pride in South Holland by supporting the district and residents to develop and thrive.'

### 5.4 **Crime and Disorder**

- 5.4.1 There are no concerns regarding crime and disorder. PDP requested clarification around the term 'offender'. This has been interpreted in the context of the Housing Allocations Policy, derived from the terminology used within the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Further commentary on this point is contained within Appendix B.

### 5.5 **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights**

- 5.5.1 Our public sector equality duty requires us to consider the impacts of any proposed changes to our policies or practice on those affected by these changes, the protected characteristics of those affected and for any adverse impacts, mitigating actions that reduce or remove these impacts.
- 5.5.2 The introduction of the requirement to apply online for housing may impact some community groups who are not IT enabled. This is mitigated by the additional arrangements being put in place to support those households who may not have access to technology to apply online. An example of this is the computer facilities available in the Priory Road reception area.
- 5.5.3 Reducing the age limit for access to Sheltered Housing will make the accommodation available to a greater number of residents. This will increase the diversity on sheltered estates and create balanced communities.
- 5.5.4 We will ensure that applicants are made aware of the consequences of refusing an offer of accommodation. The refusal will not count where it is determined that the accommodation offered is not suitable.

### 5.6 **Financial**

- 5.6.1 The Housing Revenue Account will meet the expenditure of updating existing Housing IT software to ensure it has the capability to host online housing applications. The funding for this work has been approved through the capital programme.

### 5.7 **Health & Wellbeing**

- 5.7.1 Ensuring that social housing is responsibly allocated will support the health and wellbeing of the residents of South Holland.

### 5.8 **Stakeholders / Constitution / Timescales**

- 5.8.1 Internal stakeholders have been consulted when the policy was discussed at Policy Development Panel in February and September 2018. Feedback from both meetings has been incorporated into the revised policy. Internal feedback has also been sort from the Strategic Housing Manager. External stakeholders will be notified of proposed changes through the appropriate consultation process.

6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.1 All wards.

7.0 **ACRONYMS**

7.1 IT= Information Technology.

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Background papers:- None.

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**Key Decision:** N

**Exempt Decision:** N

**This report refers to a Mandatory Service**

**Appendices attached to this report:**

Appendix A SHDC Revised draft Allocations Policy

Appendix B Offenders definition

Appendix C Modern Slavery definition