

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Communities (Introduced by Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing))	Scrutiny Committee Cabinet	Tuesday, 17 January 2023 Wednesday, 18 January 2023

Select Move allocations policy

Is this report confidential?	No
Is this decision key?	Yes
Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards

Purpose of the Report

1. The Select Move Steering Group has reviewed its allocations policy and this report seeks permission to consult on the new draft policy.

Recommendations

2. That the Cabinet approves the policy enabling the Select Move partnership to consult on the policy.
3. Any changes following the consultation are delegated for approval to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing
4. That Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the proposed Select Move Allocations Policy, and to submit the views of the committee to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing for consideration prior to its adoption of a revised allocations policy.

Reasons for recommendations

5. To fulfil the Council's Part VI statutory duties and review the Housing Allocation policy by maximising the allocation of properties to households who are in the most need and to those that can demonstrate a local connection to the borough.

Other options considered and rejected

6. The policy could remain unchanged, however, there is a requirement to keep the policy under review and ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the Council's statutory duties.

Executive summary

7. As part of the Select Move policy review, changes are proposed to improve how Social housing across the partnership is delivered, all proposed changes will be subject to consultation and can be viewed in detail on Appendix 1 and 2.
8. The amended policy proposes:
 - Strengthening the local connection rules.
 - Simplifying the banding system from 5 bands to 4 including the remove global banding.
 - Review the shortlisting procedure on how many properties an applicant can refuse before being suspended or closed.
 - Adding new categories to band B and C on early intervention for people living in unsecure and unaffordable housing.
 - Expanding the criteria for when a customer will qualify for the statutory housing need bands A, B and C.

Corporate priorities

9. The report relates to the following corporate priorities: (Please bold one)

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Background to the report

10. By law, all Local Authorities must adopt a Housing Allocations Policy under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, which must be published and kept under review. The Select Move policy requires a review to make the policy fairer and clearer, and to ensure it still reflects the partnership's priorities.
11. The draft policy aims to strengthen the local connection to the Borough. It has been identified that the current policy is less effective than neighbouring local authorities when it comes to Local connection. In the current policy Local connection is gained after 6 months of residing in the Borough. Increasing the local connection to 2 years will require people to demonstrate they have an established connection to the Borough and have

invested in our communities.

12. It has been necessary to review how properties are allocated and how shortlisting is prioritised to ensure the process is easier to understand and priority is given to those who need it most.
13. There are new proposals set out in the draft policy that recognise the current cost-of-living crisis and to address households that live in unsecure accommodation. These categories will provide a more early intervention approach and prevent households from hitting crisis point and becoming homeless due to their current property being unaffordable.
14. The draft policy recognises the need for sustainable communities and proposes to help address this by awarding a quota of properties to employment priority and therefore meeting housing need and employment together, the percentage will go out for consultation as either 10, 15 or 20%.

Proposed Policy Changes

15. **Proposed change 1:** It is proposed to strengthen the local connection rules to qualify to join the Select Move Housing Register. Increasing the threshold for local connection for an applicant to be able to join the Housing Register will prioritise established local families who have a strong connection for residence, family, or employment over applicants who cannot demonstrate such a strong connection.

Current Policy	New Policy
Have lived in a Select move Council area for 6 months out of the last 12 months or 3 years out of the last 5 years continuously.	Lived in a Select Move area continuously for the last 2 years
Have close family (normally considered to be a mother, father, brother, sister, or adult son or daughter) that have lived in the district for a minimum of the last 5 years.	Have close family (normally considered to be a mother, father, brother, sister, or adult son or daughter) that have lived in an area for a minimum of the last 5 years and, in addition, if they do not have a local connection for residence or employment they will now need to demonstrate a need to move to a Select Move partner's area to give or receive essential support from close family
Are employed in permanent employment in Select Move Council's area.	Are employed in permanent employment in a Select Move Council's area and that to travel to work by public transport would take them in excess of one hour each way.

Exceptions under homelessness to fulfill statutory duties will be applied and safeguards for applicants who apply to join the Register who have fled domestic abuse or extreme threats of violence from another area.

16. **Proposed Change 2:** Select Move is a choice based letting scheme that allows the applicant the element of choice on what properties they express their interest in. In the

current policy you can refuse three offers before an application is closed. The policy is proposing to reduce this to 2 reasonable offers, this is to enable Housing Associations to allocate properties faster and avoid a considerable loss of rent. A definition of a reasonable offer is set out in the new policy. An example of this would be a refusal of a property because it did not meet an applicant's needs for disability adaptations, this would be classed as reasonable reason to refuse a property. Applicants will be advised to bid on properties they are going to accept to avoid any penalties being imposed.

17.

Current Policy	New Policy Options for Consultation
Under the current policy an applicant can refuse 3 reasonable offers before they are removed from the Housing Register for 6 months.	If an applicant refuses 2 reasonable offers, they would be removed from the housing register and not allowed to reapply for a period of 12 months, or have their banding reduced to Band D for 12 months.

18. **Proposed Change 3:** Reducing the number of Bands from 5 to 4 A-D, this will be less complicated than the current 5 bands A-E.

Current Policy	New Policy
Band A urgent housing need cases that need to move immediately.	Band A urgent housing need cases that need to move immediately.
Band B will be for urgent housing need cases that need to move.	Band B will be for urgent housing need cases that need to move
Band C will be everyone else that the legislation states has a statutory housing need.	Band C will be everyone else that the legislation states has a statutory housing need.
Band D – applicants assessed as not being owed a reasonable preference but meet the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive community criteria (Voluntary work or employment in the SM area) • Under occupancy by one bed • Over occupancy by one bed 	Band D will be for everyone else who does not have a housing need
Band E – No housing need	Removed from new policy

19. **Proposed Change 4:** Setting aside a percentage of vacant properties for applicants who are in employment. It is proposed a percentage of properties are reserved for working households only.

Current Policy	New Policy
Under the current policy properties for employment are often allocated to Band D this captures applicants who are employed in the select move area with no	The proposal is to consult on the percentage of properties to be allocated to employment only 10, 15 or 20%.

housing need, 10% of properties are allocated to this band per annum.	By awarding a quota of properties to employment will capture employment and housing need together, however the majority of homes would not be restricted to working households.
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20. **Proposed Change 5:** Removal of Global banding and to place the requirement to have a local connection to the council where a property is advertised to the top of the shortlisting criteria. There will be safeguards for applicants who have to move from one Select Move Council area to another due to the risk of domestic abuse or other extreme threats which mean they would not be safe remaining in their ‘home’ area where they have a local connection. See appendix 2 for full details of the proposal.
21. **Proposed Change 6:** To add a new “Insecurity that risks homelessness” category to Band B. This category is not included in the current policy resulting in some families becoming homeless as their insecure living at home arrangement is not recognised as a housing need under the banding scheme.
22. **Proposed Change 7:** The proposed policy expands the criteria for when a customer will qualify for the statutory housing need bands A, B and C. The policy additionally set out clearer details for when a band will be awarded for each of the housing need criteria in each Band. This will mean assessments are always consistently applied. An additional category has been awarded to band C to capture applicants who are struggling financially and have been awarded a discretionary housing payment via Housing benefit to help pay rent. This would help prevent applicants from being evicted or incurring rent arrears. Helping people to move into more secure and affordable homes before hitting crisis point and becoming homeless. See appendix 2 detailing the band criteria for each band.

23. Consultation

Following approval being given to consult on the draft policy, a consultation programme will be undertaken, this will include a survey provided to all registered applicants via the Select move website on the key proposed changes, a link will be provided to enable all customers to view the draft policy. The link for the survey and draft policy will also be circulated to all key stakeholders. Information regarding the consultation will be provided on the select move website, all partner websites and the council’s own website. The consultation will be for the period of 10 to 12 weeks and any request for changes following the consultation to be delegated for approval to the Executive Member for Homes and Housing.

24. Climate change and air quality

The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Equality and diversity

25. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken and identifies that a full consultation is necessary which includes appropriate groups.

Risk

26. A risk register is available for the Select Move Partnership and is available on the Council's risk management system.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

27. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

28. There are no concerns from a Monitoring officer perspective. We have a duty to have a Housing Allocations Policy. Periodically this policy must be reviewed. This is what this report relates to. The approval that is being sought at this stage is to go out to consultation. Following on from the consultation period the Executive member will be granted delegated powers to approve any changes.

Background documents

There are no background papers to this report

Appendices

List the appendices in the order that they are attached to the report with titles as appropriate. Any spreadsheets/diagrams should be in pdf format and be headed up.

Appendix 1 – Draft Policy

Appendix 2 – Consultation Paper

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