
REPORT TO:	Housing & Community Services Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 7
DATE OF MEETING:	12th June 2014	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Director of Housing and Environmental Services	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Martin Guest, Performance and Policy Manager (ext 5940)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Choice Based Lettings and the implementation of the updated South Derbyshire Homefinder Allocations Policy	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCS01

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Members note the outcome of the 2013/14 operation of the South Derbyshire Homefinder Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme.
- 1.2 Members approve progress and the timetable in the implementation of the amended South Derbyshire Homefinder Allocations Policy.
- 1.3 Members approve further minor amendments to the allocation policy namely that:
 - The exemption from the local connection rule for ex-armed forces personnel applies for 5 years from the date of their leaving the forces.
 - Identification requirements be extended to include other recognised forms of ID such as birth certificates.
 - Applications are accepted from those households where the gross income of the principal earner is less than £32,000.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To advise members of the outcome of the last year of South Derbyshire Homefinder CBL Scheme from 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014.
- 2.2 To advise Members and seek approval of progress and plans regarding the implementation of the amended Allocations Policy.

3. Detail

Choice Based Lettings review of 2013/14

- 3.1 Members will recall that applicants to South Derbyshire Homefinder are categorised into four 'bands' to reflect their circumstances and housing need. These can be defined as follows
- Emergency band – Households for whom the Council has a statutory duty to re-house.
 - Band A – Homeless but no statutory duty (e.g. not in priority need) or having an urgent need to move.
 - Band B – Non urgent need to move
 - Band C – Adequately housed but wants to move
- 3.2 At its meeting on the 13th June 2013 the Housing and Community Services Committee agreed that the target quotas for each band under the amended policy were to be: Band E upto 30%, Band A 52%, Band B 18% and Band C 0%.
- 3.3 Prior to the implementation of the amended policy the existing target quotas were upto 25% prioritised to the Emergency homeless band, 47% to band A applicants, 25% to Band B and 3% to Band C.
- 3.4 During the 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 year, 287 properties were re-let to applicants as follows:
- 35 (12%) went to Emergency band
 - 118 (41%) to Band A
 - 104 (36%) to Band B
 - 30 (11%) to Band C
- 3.5 Applicants in all bands, including homelessness applicants are required to bid for a property. Analysis of the figures show that more work is needed to ensure a distribution across the bands more in line with target although some variation is inevitable. It is also true though that the fewer properties we allocate as emergencies is a positive reflection of the preventative work of the Housing Options team and enables more band A and B applicants to move which will be more about downsizing and moving to larger property i.e. making better overall use of the stock..
- 3.6 The following gives more detail of how this breaks down in some of the larger social housing communities:
- Newhall 64 properties (29 band A, 23 band B, 7 band C and 5 Emergency band)
 - Swadlincote 46 properties (26 band A, 15 band B, 3 band C and 2 Emergency band)
 - Woodville 25 properties (6 band A, 11 band B, 5 band C and 3 Emergency band)

Implementation of the updated South Derbyshire Homefinder Allocations Policy

- 3.7 Members will be aware that in June 2013 the Council adopted an updated South Derbyshire Homefinder Allocations Policy; this was subject to a 4 week consultation programme to be undertaken with tenants, all current applicants, CBL partners and other support providers for prospective tenants.
- 3.8 The consultation process commenced on the 14th October and closed on the 18th November 2013. The consultation was available online and was supported by two

drop in sessions. These sessions were attended by 19 residents of which 13 came to the session on the 5th November in Swadlincote and 6 who attended on the 6th November in Melbourne. A further session was held with the South Derbyshire Residents Forum at Unity Close on 27th November to go through any queries or feedback on the proposed changes to the policies.

- 3.9 Following consultation minor changes were made to the South Derbyshire Homefinder Allocations Policy and after discussion the amended policy was signed off by the Chairman of this Committee on the 29th November 2013. These minor changes included:
- Clarification to five years of the time period in which the exemption from the local connection rule for ex-armed forces personnel applies.
 - Broaden identification requirements to include other recognised forms of ID such as birth certificates.
- 3.10 It is also now proposed to amend the criteria for non- acceptance to the register on income grounds to:
- Applications are accepted from those households where the gross income of the principal earner is less than £32,000.
- 3.11 The original proposal was that the £32,000 threshold would be for all household income. However discussions in the consultation phase highlighted that with an adult child and two parents working, some households could be disqualified even though all members of such a household were on low incomes.
- 3.12 Following the approval of the Policy, we have been in lengthy discussions with the IT supplier of the CBL System (Abritas) to finalise the change programme required for the IT system and to agree a plan to implement this programme. These discussions have proved challenging in terms of coming to an agreement on price, and agreement was not reached until 17th March 2014.
- 3.13 A schedule of works including a project plan has therefore now been agreed between Abritas and the Council and this is being managed on a day to day basis by the Performance and Projects Officer with the support of a project team from across the service.
- 3.14 An annual review of the existing waiting list is nearing completion to establish how many of the pre-existing applicants are still in housing need. 1735 applicants that had been on the waiting list for more than 6 months were written to on the 24th March requesting them to confirm their wish to remain on the register. A reminder was sent to non-responders on the 3rd April and a final letter advising that they were about to be removed from the register was sent on the 30th April.
- 3.15 At the time of writing it is envisaged that the resultant housing register will be reduced to around 1,000. Even if applicants haven't responded to the full review of the waiting list letters, their application will be reinstated if they contact us within 6 months of the first review letter being sent out i.e. it is proposed that the final cut-off date for reinstating such applications be the 30th September 2014.
- 3.16 The system changes will be up and running and the system is scheduled to go live during the week of the 30th June 2014.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The cost of the system changes required to implement the updated South Derbyshire Homefinder Allocations Policy were budgeted for and can be met from existing resources. The final IT cost of making the changes has been agreed at £22,000.

5. Community Implications

- 5.1 The updated policy fulfills our legal obligation to give reasonable preference to certain categories of applicants showing the greatest housing need.
- 5.2 Choice Based Lettings provides an allocations system that places the initiative on the customer, provides information about the property and neighbourhood and allows customers to make an informed choice about where they live.
- 5.3 The tightening up of non-qualifying persons in the policy will mean a marginal increase of applicants excluded from the list.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 None