

Executive Summary of Key Proposed Changes

1. Community Lettings Criteria

Revised Policy Proposal –The community lettings priority should continue to be administered allowing the 12 months waiting time but have more flexibility by including the adjacent parishes to the applicant’s community connection area.

Rationale

In some localities evidence from the waiting list shows that there is not enough demand from people with a community connection for properties advertised there.

Also many smaller communities have a limited amount of social stock, therefore possibly penalising local applicants as they will have the additional community connection priority on a lower number of properties available.

This proposal will allow greater choice for applicants, whilst still recognising the need for a community connection element. It will also help to keep void properties to a minimum.

By adopting this flexibility it will be fairer to more people in housing need and will also help to decrease their waiting time on the Housing Register.

2. Demand and Eligibility (Bungalow and Ground Floor Flats)

Revised Policy Proposal - The age restrictions to bungalows would continue to apply, however this may be relaxed by implementing a variable policy which allows the lowering of the age criteria to bungalows that are hard to let. Also scope to let ground floor flats to applicants aged 60 and under giving priority to medical needs, this will be done with due regard to the make up of the existing community.

Rationale

There is low demand for ground floor flats and some bungalows from applicants aged 60 and over which can lead to void properties. Relaxing the age criteria on hard to let bungalows and allocating based on housing need (medical) will help keep the voids to a minimum. Also relaxing the age criteria on ground floor flats will keep the voids to a minimum and give applicants under the age of 60 with a housing need more priority.

3. Flexible Tenancies

Revised Policy Proposal – To pilot the Flexible Tenancy scheme and grant Flexible Tenancies to applicants that are;

- **Owner Occupiers** - who have equity/assets/savings that cannot be released, but when their circumstances change they will be in a position to secure alternative accommodation
- **Major adapted properties** – if the adaptation is no longer needed or the disabled person no longer lives in the household alternative accommodation can be offered to free up the adapted property
- **Empty Properties** – allow tenants to be housed in accommodation that is long term void i.e. prior to regeneration/refurbishment / hard to let or for tenants who require temporary accommodation until they can find alternative accommodation

Rationale

Proposals to introduce Flexible Tenancies will benefit applicants who fit the stated criteria listed to gain access to social housing or an adapted property for a fixed period until their circumstances change, either enabling them to find alternative accommodation, or in some circumstances more suitable social housing may be offered, for example, when the adaptation is no longer required. This will allow the Council to make better use of its housing stock and help more applicants into accommodation that reflects their current housing need. A pilot Flexible Tenancy Scheme will enable provisions to be in place when these types of tenancies become mandatory in place of lifetime tenancies, as proposed by the Government.

4. Property Band Quotas and Number of Bids

Revised Policy Proposal - Remove band quotas on advertised properties and allow applicants to place up to 6 bids per bidding cycle. This will mean that all applicants will have a chance to bid on any property that they are eligible for, and the applicant at the top of the shortlist will be initially offered, then as normal procedure cascading down the shortlist if the offer is refused.

Rationale

Currently a Band is given to each property advertised to give applicants within that band priority. The annual quota of empty properties advertised per each band is;

Band 1 49%

Band 2 40%

Band 3 10%

Band 4 1%

In practice the actual percentage of lets to applicants in each band differs from the CBL Allocations policy quotas. The reason for this is because there are fewer applicants in band 1 and 2 to bid for the properties, therefore when the list becomes exhausted the properties will be allocated to applicants in bands 3 and 4. The actual percentage of properties let to applicants in each band during 2014/15 was;

Band 1 26.2%

Band 2 25.8%

Band 3 24.8%

Band 4 23.2%

As the percentage of properties let is evenly spread across all four Bands, the conclusion is that the quotas set in the CBL Policy do not reflect local need or demand. It is felt that the amended procedure would allow more lettings to band 1, 2 and 3 applicants, which are applicants with a priority housing need. Removing the quotas and allowing applicants to bid on any property they are eligible for, and by extending the number of bids allowed per cycle will help the property to be let on the first bidding cycle and offer applicants more choice.

5. Medical Assessments

Revised Policy Proposal – Medical assessments will be carried out by Rykneld Homes and not by an external medical advisor. In some circumstances Rykneld Homes may contact the applicant's GP and other external organisations for verification and also applicants may be referred to Rykneld Homes' Occupational Therapist.

Rationale

Referring cases to the independent medical adviser costs approximately £2,000 per year and the current procedure can take weeks for the assessment to be concluded. In most cases the necessary information can be obtained from the applicants own GP or other support agencies. The Occupational Therapists can complete assessments on the applicants housing need with regards to type of property and any adaptations that may be required.

6. Priority Banding for Children at Heights

Revised Policy Proposal – Awarding priority Band 3 to applicants in upper floor flats/maisonettes that have a child in the household aged 5 and under

Rationale

People with small children may struggle getting upstairs to their front door, for example with a pushchair, pushchairs or shopping whilst still caring for the child.

7. Priority Banding for applicants with ‘No Fixed Abode’ and ‘Sofa Surfers’

Revised Policy Proposal – Awarding Priority Band 3 to applicants who have ‘No Fixed Abode’ and ‘Sofa Surfers’.

Rationale

Currently no priority is given to applicants who fit this criteria and would not have any priority under Homelessness Legislation, however it was felt that a priority should be awarded to help access settled accommodation which may promote health and wellbeing by creating a more stable environment.

8. Hate Crime applicants - Change Priority Banding

Revised Policy Proposal – Place applicants suffering from hate crime, and re housing is appropriate into Priority Band 1 instead of Band 2.

Rationale

Hate crime is defined by the Home Office as “any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a personal characteristic. The definition covers five main strands, in particular – disability, gender-identity, race, religion or believe and sexual orientation”

Hate crime can include;

- threatening behaviour
- assault
- robbery
- damage to property
- inciting others to commit hate crimes
- harassment

Currently in the CBL Policy hate crime falls under the heading of Anti-Social Behaviour, Hate crime is normally a more serious offence which may require the victim to be re housed urgently.

9. Access to Extra Care Housing Schemes

Revised Policy Proposal – Applicants that only seek this type of housing who have equity, savings and/or assets will be able to join the housing register and bid as appropriate, however they will not be eligible to bid for any other types of properties if their equity, savings and/or assets exceeds the £30,000 limit.

Rationale

Extra Care Housing provides varying levels of onsite care and support for tenants aged 55 and over. Vacant homes in these schemes are let via a panel made up of agencies, including Social Services, and the lettings criteria is not in line with the CBL Policy. Currently applicants that are not eligible to join the Council's housing register will not be aware if an apartment becomes available in one of these schemes. Therefore allowing them to join the register and express an interest via the bidding process it bridges the gap becoming a fairer process and making the schemes more accessible.