

## REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATION

**Report By: Head of Strategic Housing**

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To consider next steps in reviewing the Home Point Housing Allocation Policy.

### Financial Implications

2. None identified at this time.

### Background

3. Home Point is Herefordshire's Choice-Based Lettings Scheme, a partnership between Herefordshire Council and the county's largest Housing Associations. The Scheme is primarily responsible for managing the Common Housing Register, the Mutual Exchange Register and advertising available Social Housing properties.
4. Since going operational in 2002, the Allocations Policy and Home Point has previously undergone one major review in October 2004, two smaller allocation policy reviews and a number of operational reviews by Partner Housing Associations.
5. During 2008 the Adult Social Care & Strategic Housing Scrutiny Review Group has reviewed the Allocations Policy and operational aspects of Home Point and produced a number of recommendations to be investigated for feasibility by the Home Point Partnership Board.
6. The Review Group comprised Cllr P Andrews, Cllr K Grumbley, Cllr H Davies.
7. The review has covered:
  - Current waiting list information illustrating the demand for affordable housing in the county and levels of assessed need under the current Allocations Policy;
  - Housing stock availability within the Home Point Partnership including properties advertised through the Home Point system and expressed demand for advertised housing. Composition of the Home Point Partnership membership;
  - The legislative framework surrounding Housing Allocation Policies including recent consultation for the 'Allocation of Accommodation, Choice-Based Lettings, Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities';
  - A review of the current Home Point Herefordshire Housing Allocations Policy and supporting literature together with the Home Point application and bidding process;
  - A review of customer satisfaction data and consider options for qualitative and informing consultation activity with stakeholders and service users including RSL members of the Home Point Partnership.

8. The review identified / wished to highlight the following issues / findings from its investigation.
  - There is an imbalance in housing supply which leads to increasing pressure in the system for allocating scarce affordable housing.
  - Recognises the high levels of overcrowding in the county.
  - Recognises the success of the Home Point 'Talking Brochures' concept and encourages wider use of video guides and other visual media within the Authority.
  - Recognises the amendments to the Allocations Policy in 2004 have successfully impacted upon the efficiency and service provided to qualifying Aftercare Leavers.
  - Supports the need for a dedicated officer to focus on vulnerable customers at Home Point.
  - Supports increasing the minimum overall percentage of affordable housing in new developments.
  - Supports increasing the minimum percentage of rental accommodation for new affordable housing.
  - Supports the concept of a Housing Contact Centre / One Stop Shop approach to meet the wide ranging housing needs in the county.
  
9. The review identified the following items which it believed should be considered in the course of devising amendments to the allocations policy and / or the operation of Home Point.
  - Consider amending Allocations Policy to enable a percentage of properties to be advertised / allocated with a preference to existing Home Point Partnership tenants within Herefordshire currently under occupying their properties to release homes for larger families.
  - Review the difficulties experienced by customers with multiple bedroom eligibility policies within the Partnership. Investigate the feasibility of introducing a Common Policy / or a standard Home Point Bedroom Eligibility Policy to improve customer service.
  - Review the Partner contribution model to ensure costs are fairly distributed within Partnership.
  - Strengthen the Allocation Policy to ensure adapted properties are let to applicants with a suitable medical need.
  - Investigate the impact of the Allocations Policy on applicants wishing to Foster.
  - Investigate the impact of the Allocations Policy on ex-service personnel.
  - Investigate within new development whether applicants with special needs can be identified and allocated directly to specific adapted properties.
  - Investigate the feasibility / need of whether a degree of preference could be introduced for a small percentage of properties to combat worklessness.
  - Investigate possible sources of funding for a Home Point officer to concentrate on vulnerable customers.

In regard to the nature of the Home Point Partnership, the review felt that the Home Point Partnership Board was the most appropriate vehicle to consider and develop options for improvement.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**THAT;**

- (a) The Cabinet Member is requested to invite the Home Point Partnership to undertake a review of the Allocations Policy with particular attention to the recommendations identified by the Adult Social Care & Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee.**
- (b) That the Home Point Partnership review the operation of Home Point with a view to maximising the cost and operational efficiency of services with particular attention to the outcomes of the review conducted by the Adult Social Care & Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee.**
- (c) That the outcomes and recommendations from the Home Point Partnership Review be reported back to the Adult Social Care & Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee.**
- (d) That the final recommendations should be submitted to the Home Point Partnership Board and Cabinet for approval.**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- None.