

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>ADULT SOCIAL CARE &amp; STRATEGIC HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2010</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>HEREFORDSHIRE'S HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO AREA:</b>	<b>ENVIRONMENT AND STRATEGIC HOUSING</b>

**CLASSIFICATION:** Open

### **Wards Affected**

County-wide.

### **Purpose**

To seek the Committee's comments on proposed changes to Herefordshire's Housing Allocations Policy recommended by the Home Point Partnership Review Group.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT the Committee:**

- (a) notes the changes proposed and outlined in this report;
- (b) comments on the draft Allocations Policy attached at Appendix A

### **Key Points Summary**

- The Scrutiny Review of the Homepoint Allocations Policy identified a number of policy suggestions for consideration within any re-write of the policy.
- The Scrutiny Review Group resolved that a sub-group should be formed comprising the Homepoint Partner Organisations to review the current Allocations Policy and draft a revised policy.
- A number of policy amendments were incorporated into a draft Homepoint Allocations Policy and the report seeks Committee's views before the policy is considered for formal adoption by the Homepoint Partnership Board and Cabinet. The draft Policy is attached as an appendix to the report.

### **Alternative Options**

- 1 A range of policy options were considered in coming to the draft policy at **Appendix A**.

## Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To enable Committee to note and provide comment on the draft allocations policy in advance of the policy being considered for approval by Cabinet and the Home Point Partnership Board.

## Introduction and Background

- 3 Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee resolved to conduct a review of the Homepoint Allocations Policy as part of its Scrutiny Review of Homepoint.
- 4 In the course of reviewing the Allocations Policy, the Scrutiny Review group arrived at a number of policy suggestions but resolved to suggest that a sub-group should be established comprising representation from the member organisations of the Homepoint Partnership for the purpose of reviewing and re-drafting the policy.
- 5 A Homepoint Partnership Review Group was duly formed and undertook a review of the policy taking into account comments from the Scrutiny Review Group. Also taken into account was new policy guidance issued by the Communities and Local Government Department in their publication, 'Fair and flexible – statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England, issued 4<sup>th</sup> December 2009'.
- 6 The draft Housing Allocation Policy for Herefordshire is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 7 The draft at **Appendix A** will be subject to final consultation with the review group prior to consideration by the Home Point Board and Cabinet.

## Key Considerations

- 8 The draft allocations policy incorporates new policy clauses which may affect the banding priority of clients, clarifies policy wording where appropriate, and includes amendments which enable better use of available stock. However, Committee will be aware that the demand for affordable housing, reflected in the Homepoint waiting list, far outstrips the available supply.
- 9 Therefore, whilst this draft Allocations Policy aims to ensure the allocation of Registered Provider housing in Herefordshire is as transparent and equitable as possible, there will inevitably remain a number of households on the Common Waiting List for whom policy amendments will not result in significantly improving their chances of re-housing in the short-term.
- 10 The changes to the Allocations Policy are summarised below:-
  - The draft policy now incorporates the new Council logo reflecting the partnership with the Primary Care Trust.
  - The list of Homepoint Partners referenced in the policy has been amended to incorporate new Registered Providers who have joined the partnership since the last policy revision. The vast majority of Registered Housing available in the County is now advertised through Homepoint.
  - References to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) changed to Registered Providers (RPs) the new legal term for Housing Associations.
  - The Policy wording has been changed in order to clarify the procedure for officers to add or change bids when applicants to whom the full homelessness duty is owed are not applying for properties regularly or are not applying for suitable properties. The aim of this policy is to

ensure applicants work proactively to secure settled accommodation through Homepoint and also helps reduce the average length of stay for applicants in temporary accommodation.

- Policy wording has been added to confirm that a Discharge of Homeless Duty can be achieved through an allocation by a private landlord to a property through an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. This ensures that applicants are aware that best use is made of all available housing options for discharging homelessness duty rather than simply through Homepoint or an allocation to a Registered Provider's property.
- Details have been provided to show where copies of allocations policy can be found. this is a statutory requirement.
- The Policy has been amended to include a facility for 5% of properties to be set aside and offered with preference for those downsizing. the Scrutiny Review Group was interested to explore how householders could be incentivised to downsize.
- Preference given to those needing adapted / suitable properties for medical need has been strengthened. The policy aims to ensure applicants are clear that the applicant's suitability for an adapted property may override relative banding. RSL's increasingly consult with Occupational Therapist's in matching significantly adapted property to a suitable applicant and the Scrutiny Review Group wished to see the appropriate letting of adapted property maximised.
- The policy clarifies that allocations may be made by Registered Providers under sensitive lettings policies and local lettings plans. This means that where a landlord requires to let a property in a sensitive way, for instance to better balance the age profile of a residential block or neighbourhood, there is the discretion to do so.
- The policy now references the facility for a partner to make a direct match to a property where an applicant has been identified as requiring a specific property / and or adaptations. This may include an offer to an existing tenant who is known to a partner who is in need of significant or specific adaptations and/or whose needs may be urgent.
- Under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), a person may be allocated to a specific property directly to ensure the risk of re-offending is minimised. the policy now includes the provision that potential Homepoint applicants who are being managed under MAPPA arrangements may be excluded from the waiting list to ensure they do not independently secure property which might cause them to pose an increased risk.
- The Policy has been amended to change the 'Priority' banding description to 'Priority Status'.
- The current allocations policy includes provisions which gives priority banding to Care Leavers 6 months before they leave care. The policy has resulted in far better outcomes for Care Leavers in Herefordshire, reducing the chances of Care Leavers having to reside in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. the revised policy has clarified the fact that priority applies for those where duty is held in Herefordshire. There remain separate provisions under Homelessness legislation contained in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 for the status of Care Leavers generally.
- In addition to the policy which allows for a proportion of property to be prioritised for applicants downsizing there remains a policy which awards Gold band for qualifying households. the revised allocations policy now clarifies that the status only applies in respect of applicants wishing to downsize from partner landlord properties within Herefordshire.
- The policy now provides that the Silver band overcrowding criterion will be determined with regard to the upcoming Herefordshire Council policy for housing bedroom needs criteria. This policy is to be developed in consultation with the enforcement officers from the Private Sector Housing Team.

- Currently, the Silver banding status can be awarded to applicants who have a requirement for level access and the policy wording has been amended to 'suitable level access'.
- The current policy awards Silver band to applicants who wish to move on the basis that they have been subject to harassment. The revised policy has been amended to clarify that the banding is not awarded for isolated or one-off instances of harassment.
- The revised policy further clarifies what constitutes a local connection to Herefordshire. Applicants without a local connection to Herefordshire have a reduced priority for housing to an applicant who meets the local connection criterion.

## **Community Impact**

11 None as this report does not seek adoption of a policy.

## **Financial Implications**

12 None.

## **Legal Implications**

13 None.

## **Risk Management**

14 None.

## **Consultees**

15 The Home Point Partnership Review Group has been a consultee to this review and was formed following a recommendation by the Scrutiny review group. Members were selected for their wide ranging expertise in Social Housing.

## **Appendices**

16 Appendix A - Housing Allocations Policy.

## **Background Papers**

None identified.