

Community Development Scrutiny Panel	AGENDA ITEM No. 5
4 November 2008	PUBLIC REPORT

Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Graham Murphy, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Economic Development	
Contact Officer(s):	Adrian Chapman, Head of Strategic Growth & Development Tracy Wilson, Interim Housing Options Manager	Tel. 863887 864064

PETERBOROUGH HOUSING REGISTER AND ALLOCATIONS POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM : Officer	Deadline date : 1st December 2008
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the panel notes and approves the additions to the policy 2. That the panel recommends to Cabinet the approval of the additions to the Peterborough Housing Register and Allocations Policy 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to Community Development Scrutiny Panel following recommendation from the Peterborough Choice Based Lettings Board.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to draw the panel's attention to proposed additions to the Peterborough Housing Register and Allocations Policy.
- 2.2 This report is for Community Development Scrutiny Panel to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3 ***[Cabinet Team to complete this section following liaison with Author] [Do NOT include any other text under this heading].***

3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	Major Policy	If Yes, date for relevant Council Meeting	February 2009
		Date for submission to Government Dept (please specify which Government Dept)	n/a

4. PETERBOROUGH HOUSING REGISTER AND ALLOCATIONS POLICY

4.1 Background

In accordance with the Housing Act 1996 Part VI (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), Local Authorities and/or agents administering the Local Authority's allocations scheme must provide a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme by 2010. Choice Based Lettings has been in operation in Peterborough since 2004.

Choice Based Lettings aims to provide applicants with as much choice as possible by openly advertising vacancies and inviting applicants to express their interest in voids for which they are eligible. This system further aims to simplify existing allocations procedures and provide an open and transparent service to applicants. For the purposes of this CBL scheme, an applicant includes anyone seeking housing through the scheme, including existing tenants wishing to transfer.

Peterborough City Council and the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) listed below have worked in partnership with tenants and stakeholders to produce this common housing policy for allocating their properties in Peterborough. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are housing associations, regulated by the Housing Corporation, that provide affordable housing on a not-for-profit basis.

Accent Nene	Cross Keys Homes	Minster General Housing Association
Axiom Housing Association	echg	Muir Group
BPHA	Home Housing	Wherry Housing
Circle Anglia	Longhurst Homes	

Instead of each organisation having its own housing register, the Council maintains a single housing register for Peterborough. This makes it easier for applicants to find out about housing. Therefore, the likelihood of finding a home does not depend upon which landlord an applicant approaches.

In general, the policy is considered fit for purpose and all proposed changes are of a minor nature to reflect the growth of the scheme.

4.2 Proposed additions to current policy

4.2.1 Unacceptable Behaviour – Rent Arrears (Addition to Section 4.2.3)

This item has been added to give clarity to what constitutes an unacceptable level of arrears. Previously this has been determined on a case by case basis by officers.

Policy addition

Applicants who have four weeks arrears of rent (net of Housing Benefit) with an RSL or Local Authority will be given reduced priority for an offer of accommodation.

Priority may be restored for applicants who enter an agreement to re-pay and maintain the agreement for at least thirteen weeks.

Requests for review of decisions concerning rent arrears will be considered by a panel comprised of representatives from partner RSLs and Housing Options.

4.2.2 Transfers (Addition to Section 5.2)

This item has been added to encourage tenants to fulfil the requirements of their tenancy agreement. It will also assist in creating settled communities.

Policy addition

Applicants will not normally be allowed to register for a transfer until they have maintained their current tenancy satisfactorily for a period of 12 months.

Requests for review of decisions concerning this policy will be considered by a panel comprised of representatives from partner RSLs and Housing Options.

4.2.3 Choice Based Lettings (Addition to Section 8.5)

This item has been added to further enable the authority to assess an applicant's actual housing need. It will also serve to promote choice and prevent applicants continuously refusing properties which are available and reasonable for them to occupy.

Policy addition

Applicants who unreasonably turn down three offers of accommodation or who continually fail to attend viewings without good reason may be invited to an interview to discuss this.

If this behaviour continues consideration can be given to by-passing the applicant on relevant shortlists. A decision to take this course of action must be ratified by a panel comprised of representatives from partner RSLs and Housing Options.

5. CONSULTATION

Proposed amendments to the policy were submitted in the first instance to the Choice Based Lettings Operations Group in May 2008. The group considered these recommendations and approved the revised policy in July 2008. The policy was then presented to and approved by the Choice Based Lettings Board in August 2008. Cllr Graham Murphy, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Economic Development has also been consulted and supports the proposed amendments to the policy.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

It is anticipated that the consideration of this report will result in the review and development of the Peterborough Housing Register and Allocation Policy, ensuring that it is Fit for Purpose and fully supported by Officers and Members. The Housing Allocations Policy will provide an evidenced and resourced basis for meeting the housing needs of all households across Peterborough within market and resource constraints. The policy will also evidentially support the following documents:

- Sustainable Communities Strategy
- Local Area Agreement
- Core Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Housing Strategy

5. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy aims to:

- provide a single route of access to social housing in Peterborough by using a common housing register and a common allocation policy
- allocate social housing fairly and transparently, according to the applicant's priority need
- meet the Council's statutory duties in housing homeless persons
- prioritise nominations to RSLs and other Councils
- prevent the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families
- minimise the cost of homelessness to the Council and to Council tax payers
- maximise choice for applicants as far as possible, whilst acknowledging that housing is in short supply
- make effective use of the social housing stock in Peterborough
- maximise opportunities for mobility among tenants of social housing
- help build and sustain cohesive communities
- contribute to the speedy allocation of properties
- recognise and support individual needs where appropriate
- enable partner RSLs to meet their charitable objectives
- encourage and support sustainable communities
- encourage and support social and financial inclusion

- ensure applicants are treated fairly, individually and in accordance with the Partners commitment to Equality and Diversity
- provide timely feedback about homes let through the scheme

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The Authority has a statutory duty to maintain a fit for purpose allocation policy, hence maintaining the status quo and periodically revising and updating the policy is considered to be the most suitable option.

7. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The policy will have implications for all sections of society and all wards and parishes of the local authority area.
- 9.2 Financial Implications: There are no immediate financial implications following from the approval of the policy.
- 9.3 Cross-Service Implications

The policy has many cross cutting themes and relies on inter-departmental and organisation working. All parties affected by proposed amendments to the policy have been consulted with. Actions have been developed in partnership with affected parties.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

Peterborough Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2007
 Peterborough Housing Needs Analysis 2007
 Peterborough Integrated Growth Study
 Corporate Plan 2007-2010
 Sustainable Communities Strategy
 Local Area Agreement
 Draft Peterborough Core Strategy
 Regional Housing Strategy 2005-10
 Draft East of England Plan
 Code for Sustainable Homes
 Peterborough City Council's Empty Homes Strategy 2006-2008
 Peterborough City Council's Affordable Warmth Strategy
 Peterborough City Council's Renewals Policy
 Peterborough City Council's Rent Deposit Scheme
 Peterborough City Council's Private Sector Leasing Scheme
 Peterborough Supporting People Five Year Strategy (2005 - 2010)
 Peterborough City Council's Draft Planning Obligations Strategy
 Strategy for Older People's Accommodation and Housing Related Support Services for Peterborough
 Allocation of Housing and Homelessness Regulations 2006
 Children Act 1989
 Homelessness Act 2002
 Housing Act 1985
 Housing Act 1996
 Housing Act 2004
 Immigration Act 1971
 Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 Local Government Act 2000
 Landlord and tenant act 1985
 Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976
 Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (CLG: 2006)
 Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives (ODPM: 2005)
 Preventing Homelessness; A strategy health check (CLG: 2006)
 'More than a Roof' (ODPM: 2002)
 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
 Housing Green Paper- Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable
 Children and Young Peoples Bill 2007
 Hills Report into Social Housing (CLG: 2007)
 Cave Review (CLG: 2007)
 Housing Corporation 'Design and Quality Standards'

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