

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 26

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Proposed Local Lettings Plan – council sheltered housing		
Date of Meeting:	15 July 2009		
Report of:	Director of Adult Social Care and Housing		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Helen Clarkmead	Tel: 293350
	E-mail:	Helen.clarkmead@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Key Decision:	No	Forward Plan No: HSG 11247	
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The proposed Local Lettings Plan is at the request of tenants through the Chairman's Focus Group [2008] and Sheltered Housing Action Group.
- 1.2 It is envisaged this local lettings plan will help make more efficient use of the council's sheltered housing stock, and improve support for vulnerable older people who need to move within sheltered housing.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Housing agrees the following:

- (1) That when allocating vacant Brighton and Hove City Council sheltered housing units, priority is firstly given to BHCC sheltered housing tenants who need to move within the same scheme and secondly to existing BHCC sheltered housing tenants who need to move to another scheme. Where a flat has significant disabled adaptations, the incoming tenant must be in need of these.
- (2) That where there are no bids for two bedroom sheltered housing from eligible households assessed as needing two bedrooms then the unit can be offered to qualifying two person households with an assessed need for one bedroom. Where no such households bid, then the unit may be offered to a single person eligible for sheltered housing.
- (3) That the restriction preventing letting of sheltered flats to people with a partner or carer aged under 60 is removed. A sole tenancy would be offered to the person who is over 60.
- (4) That a new process of assessment to better ensure risk is appropriately managed, that support needs of new residents can be met fully and promote

greater balance of support need within and between schemes, is introduced in September 2009.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Brighton and Hove City Council manage more than 800 units of sheltered housing for people aged over 60 who are in need of housing related support. These proposals relate only to sheltered housing, not general stock.

Priority for existing BHCC sheltered tenants

- 3.2 Some sheltered housing tenants need to move within the Scheme they already live in to a different flat. Reasons may include reduced mobility, the need for level access, or needing another bedroom for a carer. Sheltered housing schemes are sociable, supportive environments. Many tenants who need to move would prefer to stay with their friends, Scheme Manager, support network, GP and in an area with which they are familiar. Consultation with tenants has clearly evidenced a need for this. Whilst numbers are expected to be fewer than 20 each year, the impact and potential benefit for these people is very high. Where the appropriate type of accommodation is not available at the same scheme, it is proposed that existing tenants are afforded priority to move between schemes. This will help tenants move to neighbouring schemes where they can maintain social, medical and support networks and remain in a familiar area.

The impact for other people seeking to move into sheltered housing

- 3.3 The impact for other people seeking to move into sheltered housing would be minimal, as fewer than 20 lets are anticipated under this policy each year, and there would not be a net reduction in the number of sheltered flats offered to Homemove users. Instead of the original vacant property being available to all eligible Homemove users, that vacated by the tenant who transfers would be offered instead. The scheme would be constantly monitored and reviewed quarterly to identify and evaluate any disadvantage to non-tenants.

Removal of age restriction for carers and partners

- 3.4 Many people who would benefit from the support and social aspects of sheltered housing are being prevented from applying because they have a partner or residential carer who is not yet 60. It is proposed that this restriction is removed. The tenant would of course be responsible for ensuring the carer behaves appropriately within the scheme. Where the tenant dies, leaving the younger person in occupation, if there are succession rights, then the survivor would be expected to move to a general needs property.

Letting two bedroom sheltered property

- 3.5 Some 2 bedroom property does not attract bids from households assessed as needing two bedrooms. This can mean the property remaining empty for long periods and loss of income. It is therefore proposed that, if no

households assessed as needing 2 bedroom property bid, then households assessed as needing one bedroom can be considered – two person households would take priority over single people within this category.

Prevention of anti social behaviour, risk management and meeting support needs

- 3.6 Residents have asked that measures to minimise the risk of anti social behaviour, especially that related to drug and alcohol use, are put in place. The new assessment process will involve through risk assessment of potential residents and ensure support needs can be met within sheltered housing. People whose behaviour is thought likely to pose a risk to the health, safety and welfare of other residents, or who have support needs that cannot be met, will not be able to bid for sheltered housing. The new assessment process will also help build a sustainable, more balanced, community in each scheme in terms of individual support need and avoid concentration of people with high support needs in particular schemes.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 These proposals emerged from consultation with representatives of sheltered Housing tenants and were formally endorsed by tenant representatives at the Sheltered Housing Action Group on April 8 2009.
- 4.2 Partner Registered Social Landlords and Community groups representing the interests of older people have been consulted, and are generally supportive of the scheme.
Concern has been raised that in giving priority to exiting tenants the council may be placing Homeseekers and those wishing to transfer from other landlords at a disadvantage. Any disadvantage is likely to be insignificant given the expected low volume of internal transfer activity, and that the net supply of units available generally will not be reduced.
Concern has been raised that disabled people needing a ground floor unit may be disadvantaged if existing tenants have priority for all units. Designated Mobility standard units would still only be let to those assessed as needing this type of unit, and priority would only be afforded to tenants who fall within this category.
- 4.3 The council's Supporting People team have been consulted and some changes made to recommendations around equality of access to the service.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Any proposals which make more efficient use of the council's stock and reduce the amount of time that properties lie empty, increase the amount of annual rent collected for the Housing Revenue Account. If implemented, careful monitoring will then be needed to quantify the effects

of these changes and to ensure that income from rents does indeed increase or at least stay the same.

Monica Brooks, Principal Accountant, 8th April 2009

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 A local housing authority is only entitled to allocate accommodation in accordance with its Allocation Policy. The Council's Allocation Policy is the recently revised Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL). The proposals in this report constitute a departure from the existing lettings scheme. CBL does include provision for the adoption of local lettings plans by the Housing Management Consultative Committee and Cabinet Member for Housing. Once adopted, the Plan will override the existing letting criteria. It is not considered that any individual's human rights will be adversely affected by the report's recommendations.

Liz Woodley, Senior Lawyer, 18 March 2009

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 There is potential for some negative impact for people who are not existing BHCC sheltered housing tenants, but need low level flats. This impact is anticipated to be minimal as the number of flats lets under this scheme is expected to be relatively low. Where a flat meets defined mobility standards, this will not be let to a tenant not in need of an adapted property – this reduces the potential for negative impact upon disabled people. Although it is proposed that existing BHCC tenants would have priority bidding for vacant flats, the net number of flats available for general bids would remain unchanged as units vacated by tenants who transfer will be advertised in place of those originally vacant. The removal of barriers to letting two bed properties is a positive move as it extends access to a wider range of people. This scheme will be monitored, reviewed and evaluated against equality impact regularly and amended to counter any significance bias that emerges.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Enabling older people to stay within the same block or neighbourhood will help sustain communities and reduce population change.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 The arrangements for assessment of new tenants will reassure residents and it is envisaged reduce anti social behaviour in sheltered schemes.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 These proposals reduce the risk of 2 bed flats remaining vacant. These proposals reduce the risk of alcohol and drug related anti social behaviour in sheltered housing schemes. These proposals increase opportunity for older people to remain within settled communities whilst meeting changing needs.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.7 There are none

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

6.1 The main alternative is not to set up a local lettings plan for sheltered housing. This has not been recommended as it would not help meet the objective of best use of council housing stock and would not meet the expressed aspirations of tenants.

6.2 The compromise alternative would be to designate 25% or 30% of vacant flats as being for priority allocation to existing tenants. This would significantly reduce tenant choice and unpopular with the tenants consulted.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 To make most efficient use of the council's sheltered housing stock.

7.2 To meet the aspirations of tenants in making it easier and less stressful for existing BHCC sheltered housing tenants to transfer when their current flat no longer meets their needs.

7.3 To ensure people entering sheltered housing are risk assessed and any risks managed to reduce the likelihood of anti social behaviour.

7.4 To ensure incoming sheltered housing tenants' support needs are assessed, that these can be met by the sheltered service and to create balanced communities of people with high, medium and low support needs in each scheme.

7.5 To allow people who are over 60 with support needs but a resident carer or partner who is not yet 60 to apply for sheltered housing.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None

Documents In Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. Equalities Impact Assessment for proposed Local Lettings Plan, Sheltered Housing, April 2009

