

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 21 MARCH 2013
title: ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW – CONSULTATION RESPONSE
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To provide Committee with an up to date position in relation to the proposed allocations policy and also invite comments on the consultation responses.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – To address the identified housing needs in the borough.
- Corporate Priorities - To ensure fair access to housing.
- Other Considerations – N/A

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The first draft of the allocations policy was considered by Health and Housing Committee in November 2012. Since this time the following actions have been undertaken:

- The allocations policy has been discussed in detail with Ribble Valley Homes Policy sub group.
- Consultation with other registered providers operating in the Ribble Valley.
- Consultation with Ribble Valley Homes customers, both tenants and applicants.

2.2 As explained in November, the policy is actually a joint Ribble Valley Homes and Ribble Valley Borough Council policy. The local authority are legally obliged to publish the allocations policy and Ribble Valley Homes manage the waiting list and allocations properties on our behalf.

2.3 In November, there were a number of questions raised by Members and Ribble Valley Homes board Members, and it was agreed some consultation would be undertaken. The policy and procedures for allocations at Ribble Valley Homes will be amended in line with the agreed Ribble Valley Borough Council allocations policy.

3 ISSUES

3.1 Consultation was undertaken on the following issues:

- Do we want to increase points for those under occupying and do we want to offer those points across all social tenancies.

Following on from consultation, it has been proposed that points for under occupying are increased from their current levels and apply across all social housing provider tenancies, not just those owned by Ribble Valley Homes. This decision has been taken on the basis of good housing management and will make the best use of the stock whilst minimising the impact of welfare reform.

- Consideration around local lettings policies

Following consultation, it was agreed that in villages with less than 3000 residents, allocation of social housing stock would be prioritised for those with a local connection to that village. Local connection would be determined in line with a Section 106 local connection criteria for new development. This change to our policy formalises what has occurred in practice since the point of transfer. It was also supported that more detailed local lettings policy for schemes maybe developed if it was felt appropriate to balance a mix of those economically active and those on benefits and a mix of ages and family sizes.

- What is our view in relation to those with sufficient financial resources to compete in the housing market

Following consultation it is proposed that there are some restrictions on rehousing applicants who can afford to compete in a traditional housing market. However, the waiting list will remain open to all those with capital over £100,000 or weekly net incomes of greater than £500 and will be asked to complete a detailed financial assessment before housing needs points can be awarded. This will not apply to elderly applicants who need to move to sheltered accommodation on medical grounds, as there is a lack of appropriate housing for them to access.

- Armed Forces

In line with the Localism Act, reasonable preference will now be given to applicants who served in the armed forces within the last five years. They will not need to have a local connection.

- Should we set a percentage of lets for those economically active?

Following consultation it is proposed that up to 30% of general needs vacancies are offered to economically active households.

- Should we seek to have a common allocations policy across Ribble Valley?

This was not felt to be necessary as Ribble Valley Homes and Ribble Valley Borough Council already allocate approximately 75% of all other Registered Provider vacancies via nominations from our waiting list.

- Should we refuse applications from those who never receive an offer due to having low priority?

96% of all those consulted felt the waiting list should remain open to all.

3.2 Proposal

That Members consider the findings from the consultation process. Should Committee approve the recommended policy, it is proposed to operate the new allocations policy from 1 July. This timetable will allow us and Ribble Valley Homes time to:

- Amend the housing application forms to collect relevant information.
- Secondly, make changes to Ribble Valley Homes IT systems to enable points of the allocations to be amended to reflect the changes.
- Advise all applicants that their application will be reviewed.
- Undertake the review of all applications. Initial testing for new points awarded has been undertaken to ensure the new policy does not create any anomalies. It is recognised that the points awarded may need to be further analysed to ensure fairness.

The policy will be programmed for consideration at the May committee cycle.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The additional resources required will be RVH staff time.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – No implications identified.
- Political – The allocations policy will reflect the changes introduced in the Localism Act.
- Reputation – To demonstrate the Council has responded to the new powers available within the Act.
- Equality & Diversity – The reviewed Allocations Policy will meet quality and diversity requirements.

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Consider the issues raised and support the drafting of the policy to reflect the comments set out in Section 3 of the report.

5.2 Refer the policy to the Strategic Housing Working Group for detailed discussion prior to reporting to this Committee in May

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