

**STRATEGIC TENANCY POLICY – AMENDMENTS FOLLOWING CONSULTATION****1 FRONT PAGE**

We have amended the document to be called 'Wiltshire's Tenancy Strategy' as using the term Strategic Tenancy Policy was deemed confusing when as a local authority we are also required to produce a tenancy policy.

**2 AFFORDABLE RENTS**

We have noted some of the concerns regarding rents being set at 80%, however we need to be aware that the housing providers bids to the Homes and Communities Agency were all based on 80% open market rents so the providers will not be able to afford to charge less than this and would have to apply the 80% charge.

Our SHMA, which is a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is a comprehensive analysis of Wiltshire's housing market. It is a key element of the evidence base for developing the Wiltshire's Local Development Framework. This suggests an affordable rent of 70% as being more affordable to those on the register, but the SHMA was working from the assumption that we wanted to try and limit the requirement for households to be benefit dependant, which is why it has recommended setting affordable rents at 70%.

The difference between a 70% and 80% affordable rent on an average two bed property is £15pm / £65pcm / £780pa (bearing in mind substantial local variation in rental prices)

The SHMA estimates that 11,042 households on the register could not afford 80% rents without benefit (as compared to 9,701 at 70%), therefore the impact of the benefit bill assuming 580 new builds per year, formally let at social rents, now let at affordable rents, is likely to be in the region of £700,000pa. In all cases affordable rents set at 80% would be affordable when claiming housing benefit as it would be below the housing benefit cap. We therefore intend to support rents being set at upto 80%.

We have made the strategy clearer to show that affordable rents are 'up to a maximum of 80% and only on new developments that are part of the HCA's 4 year development plan.

**3 AFFORDABLE RENT VALUATIONS**

We have removed the final section in paragraph 3, page 5 'and each affordable rent property must be valued individually, taking into account aspects such as its location and size' as the wording indicates that all affordable rented homes should be valued individually. We recognise that this would be too restrictive, create unnecessary cost and would prevent registered providers from using beacon properties to calculate rents or re-using valuations on the same type of property and in the same location which had been recently obtained.

**4 TENANCIES**

The Council recognises that there are positives and negatives to the introduction of flexible tenancies and would ask that providers consider these when making final decision within their individual tenancy policies.

## 5 EXCLUSIONS

Providers should consider any exclusions from the use of fixed term tenancies that they feel appropriate, but we have included three additional exclusions that we believe are appropriate:

- any customer of retirement age who is living in a home which is suitable for their needs e.g. 1 bed property not classed as older persons' accommodation or extra care.
- any customer identified as needing accommodation for witness protection or safeguarding issues.
- a tenant with a spouse or child with a lifelong need for support or who is terminally ill

The council has also recognised and supports any provider who has decided not to take up the introduction of flexible tenancies

## 6 REVIEW CRITERIA

One of the reasons specified for consideration in a review at the end of a fixed term tenancy was an adapted property. It was considered that this was too vague and should be expanded. We have now stated:-

A property that has had major adaptation work where the tenant no longer needs the adaptation, including but not limiting too, ground floor extensions, level access showers, stair or through floor lifts.

The former wording in the review sections suggests that responsibility to explore options for alternative accommodation for tenants who have been served notice lies solely on registered providers and we recognise that the Council's also has a role to play in providing options advice to those tenants who have been asked to leave. A procedure should be adopted between all housing providers and Wiltshire Council to be clear about roles and responsibilities after a tenant has been served notice to leave.

## 7 SUCCESSION

We recognise the importance of protecting siblings who have been residing with a tenant, maybe as a carer or as their only or main principle home when it comes to succession rights, and we are mindful of the minimum statutory requirement for succession rights. Because of this we have amended the wording as follows:-

We would strongly encourage housing providers to include siblings within their succession rights if they have been living with the tenant as their only or main principle home for a period of 12 months.

## 8 DISPOSALS

Wiltshire Council recognises that we have not provided enough detail to help providers with requests for support from the authority for the disposal of properties. We are aware that there may be occasions when it makes sense to dispose of a property that has previously been available for social renting, either because the property is uneconomic to maintain, or it is not of a type or in a location which meets housing need, or where the proceeds of disposal are needed to support the development of more housing

## 9 ALLOCATIONS

Following the introduction of the Localism Act we now have a new guidance for the allocation of social housing that we are required to follow. We are therefore in the process of conducting a full review that will start in Sept 2012 and is likely to take 12 months to complete. During this review we will be considering things such as

**Formal amendments made following 3 month consultation**

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local connection, consideration of the band – including Bronze and the categories within the bands. Until the review no major changes to the policy will be carried out