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Report

Report Subject : Review of the Housing Allocations Policy

Report to: : The Cabinet

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Cabinet Member for Community & Housing: Councillor John Cole-Morgan

1. Purpose:

To seek Member's views and approval to introduce, subject to consultation, a more informed assessment process for sheltered housing applicants.

2. Background:

One of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review on the changes to sheltered housing services was to review the process for allocating sheltered housing accommodation.

The current Housing Allocations Policy does not distinguish between general needs and older people housing need assessments. This policy is currently under review as the council is examining the most appropriate Choice Based Lettings system. The introduction of this is still some eighteen months away.

3. The existing allocations process:

Currently older people are considered in the same way as general needs housing. If the applicant has a medical condition then this should have been assessed by the Medical Panel. However, this will not take account of social circumstances and without any home visit, any assessment will fail to pick up on the ability of a person to live independently.

As a result, officers are finding that in some cases inappropriate allocations are being made due to the limited availability of information. A person who is then subsequently allocated accommodation in a sheltered housing scheme can then place an undue burden on the housing support service and potentially destabilise the cohesion within a scheme.

4. Why assess older people's need for sheltered accommodation?

The council's sheltered housing service has, over the past two years, undergone significant change. The role of sheltered housing is now focused towards:

- Developing a more explicit role for sheltered housing as part of enabling people to maintain their independence;
- Expanding, promoting and developing the preventative role of sheltered housing;
- Promoting the community role for sheltered housing;
- Expanding the role of sheltered housing schemes as resource centres.



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It is therefore important that prospective tenants understand this focus and their assessment fits with this.

5. Proposed assessment process:

Examination of good practice has revealed the importance of having quality assessment processes. The following proposals follow good practice:

That the Housing Support Officers will undertake home visits, at the time of application, and carry out an assessment of an older person's suitability for sheltered housing accommodation.

To extend the role of the Medical Panel to assess older people's medical need for sheltered housing accommodation.

6. What will the assessment include?

A number of factors are taken into account when applications for Sheltered Housing are assessed, and applicants may have requirements and needs in any of the following areas:

1. Safety and Security for the future
2. Medical conditions
3. Mobility problems
4. Need for community living
5. Need for counselling and support
6. Desire to downsize living space

Appendix 1 considers these headings in more detail.

7. Who will be eligible?

- Any applicant can apply to the housing register and subject to having been living within the district boundary for at least six months or have a close relative living who resides in the district and who will be providing care and support. If an applicant fails to meet these criteria then they will be placed on the reserve register.
- Except in exceptional circumstances, the applicant and partner must be over 60. We may accept people slightly younger but these people must be registered disabled and at least 55 years old or over.
- The applicant's property's net equity level does not exceed the current Housing Allocations Policy ceiling of a maximum of £100,000. This also includes any savings the applicant(s) may have.
- People who have bought their property under the "Right to Buy scheme" will be considered but the period of ownership will be taken into account. (This is currently 3 years).
- Other reasonable options, which might meet the applicant's housing and support needs will be taken into account.
- Applicants will be asked to give a written undertaking that they will sell their property on the open market once they have been advised that they have been placed on the housing waiting list.

8. The need for Sheltered Housing is assessed using the following criteria:

(In each case, 'applicant' means the single applicant, or one of the applicants if applying as a couple)

- The applicant is physically and emotionally frail, in need of the contact and support offered by the Sheltered Housing Officer and would benefit from regular contact with the other tenants.
- The applicant is vulnerable and at risk.
- The applicant wishes to move to Sheltered Housing
- The suitability of the applicant's present accommodation and their suitability for Sheltered Housing.
- Other options which might meet the applicant's housing and support needs.
- The need for "Extra Care" Sheltered Housing

- The need for specialist housing provision – for example, there are services for people with visual impairment.

9. Consultation:

Subject to Cabinet approval, consultation will be undertaken with:

- Community & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel
- Sheltered Housing Tenants Panel
- Registered Social Landlords
- Wiltshire PCT – South Wiltshire
- Wiltshire County Council – Supporting People Team

10. Conclusion:

Subject to the outcome of the consultation, the implementation of this process should significantly improve the assessment procedures and lead to improved allocations to sheltered housing properties.

11. Recommendation:

Cabinet are recommended to approve the amendments as set out in paragraphs 5,6,7 & 8 to the Housing Allocations Policy, subject to consultation, and delegate authority to the Head of Strategic Housing Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to make any minor amendments.

12. Implications:

Financial:	None
Legal:	Housing Act 1996 requires the council to consult stakeholders in respect to any changes with the Housing Allocation Policy
Human Rights:	Article 8 (the right to respect for private and family life) does not confer the right to a home.
Personnel:	None in respect of this report
Community Safety:	None in respect of this report
Environmental:	None in this report
Council's Core Values	Promoting excellent service, supporting the disadvantaged, being fair and equitable, communicating with the public, wanting to be an open, learning council and a willing partner.
Wards affected:	All
Consultation undertaken	Contained in the Report

Consideration of the headings in more detail

Safety/Security

- the ageing process
- fear of crime
- need for support
- living in a property in poor repair
- recent bereavement

Medical Condition which:

- makes property unsuitable
- makes daily living tasks difficult
- affects social involvement
- is degenerative

Mobility

- mobility is impaired (need for walking aids)
- one of the applicants is an amputee
- one of the applicants disabled
- one of the applicants uses a wheelchair
- current accommodation does not have level access
- current accommodation is on more than one level

Community Living

- need for community support
- feelings of isolation
- friends are unable to visit
- the need to be nearer family/carer or other
- lack of family support
- requirement for social involvement
- requirement to be with others of a similar age

Counselling and Support

- difficulty filling in forms
- difficulty dealing with agencies
- state of confusion
- need for an advocate
- assistance with managing finances

Downsizing

- difficulty maintaining present accommodation
- living in family-sized accommodation (2/3 bedrooms)
- difficulty maintaining a garden