

**CLLR JONATHON SEED
CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING, LEISRE, LIBRARIES AND FLOODING**

SERVICE AREA: **Adult Care and Housing**

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REFERENCE: HL-01-16

AMENDMENTS TO THE COUNCILS HOMES4WILTSHIRE POLICY

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure, Libraries and flooding to make two amendments to the Homes4Wiltshire policy (Appendix 1) that was approved by cabinet on 22nd November 2013.
 - To amend the bedroom standard criteria set within the policy to enable those over pensionable age to bid for 1 or 2 bedroom accommodation.
and
 - To include within the local connection section of the policy, that local connection to Extra Care accommodation will be defined within the Extra Care procedure.

The proposed policy amendments are required in response to a number of recommendations from those over state retirement age who have requested to move into 2 bed sheltered or bungalow accommodation but who have not been able too, as well as from our housing providers who would like to be able to offer there 2 bed accommodation to those over pensionable age.

This has also been highlighted by our recent Peer Review who have noted a recommendation within the current draft reports that suggests we review our allocations policy in regard to older people.

We have also been reviewing how we allocate our Extra Care properties and as all our extra care schemes are in a town location, we have to ensure that we are offering fair access to these schemes to those in rural locations. Therefore local connection for extra care should be determined in a different way to enable those in rural locations surrounding any extra care scheme to be treated as having a local connection in the same way as those within the town.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. Within the Council's business plan it identified the need to enable households to live in their own homes for longer and that we would invest in preventative services for older people and reduce the number of people needing residential care. By enabling older people to be allocated a second bedroom it will enable them to stay in their homes even if in the future they have an identified need for overnight care or the need to have specialist equipment that requires additional space. This is likely to reduce the need for referrals into nursing homes or residential placements in the future.

Main Considerations for the Council

3. The recommendation to enable those over pensionable age to bid for 1 or 2 bedroom accommodation would help bring in line the council's allocation policy with the priority for the council to allow older people to live at home for longer.

This should help to encourage older people to move into age designated accommodation and free up potential family accommodation. Having an additional bedroom will also enable older people to remain at home even when an overnight carer may be required in the future.

Wiltshire Council would only look to develop Extra Care in a suitable and sustainable location and this would have to be within one of the towns within Wiltshire. If we were to maintain the current local connection arrangements for the allocation of social housing, we may have an occasion with an applicant with very high support needs overlooked because they live in the adjoining parish as we may have identified someone with a local connection to the town in the first instance.

As Extra Care will never be developed in the smaller parishes and villages we have to ensure that those people living in these locations are not disadvantaged for not having a local connection to a town.

We have therefore recommended that for the allocation of extra care accommodation we will apply different local connection criteria which will be contained within the extra care procedure.

The proposed policy change on those over pensionable age has been discussed with the four main housing providers and all are in support of this policy change to help facilitate moves for those over state retirement age into a choice of 2 or 1 bed accommodation that is advertised through Homes4Wiltshire.

The allocation of extra care is being discussed with the adult care team, housing and care providers and we are currently considering a final draft for approval.

Background

4. The Homes4Wiltshire policy has been developed in partnership with Wiltshire Council and 32 other housing providers who have social housing stock in Wiltshire. The policy is used for letting and selling affordable housing and allows applicants to make informed choices about the type of accommodation that best meets their housing needs and aspirations.

The policy meets the statutory requirements for the allocation of social housing and also allocates in line with the bedroom standard.

Welfare Reform

The Welfare Reform Act that received royal assent on 8 March 2012 made a number of changes to the welfare system, including changes to the Housing Benefit system. One of the changes introduced was the size criteria for social homes as a measure of appropriateness for working age households. The new size criteria for social housing, is based on the number of bedrooms required. The general principles are:

- one bedroom for every couple or individual aged 16 and over
- an expectation that children of the same gender aged under 16 will share a bedroom
- an expectation that children aged under 10 will share regardless of gender
- disabled tenants that require an overnight carer will require an extra bedroom

The maximum amount of rent eligible to be covered by Housing Benefit will be reduced by a percentage rate for each 'excess' bedroom – there will be a 14% reduction for one excess bedroom and a 25% reduction for two or more excess bedrooms. This change came into force in April 2013, however those over pensionable age have been excluded from this criteria and due to the difficulties being experienced with letting 2 bed bungalows and sheltered accommodation we have consulted with our main housing providers and all have agreed to this proposed amendment.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

5. During the development of the Allocations Policy the Overview and Scrutiny were consulted and a recent report has gone to the board with an update on the recommendations. No further involvement has been requested at this time.

Safeguarding Considerations

6. The proposed recommendation in this report have no safeguarding considerations that need to be highlighted

Public Health Implications

7. The proposed recommendations have no public health considerations

Procurement Implications

8. The recommendation contained within this report have no procurement implications

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

9. The policy detailed herein aims to deliver quality services without prejudice and discrimination to meet the needs of all households, regardless of age, cultural or ethnic background, disability, gender, marital status, religious or political persuasion or sexual orientation and will adhere to the equality and diversity policy developed by Wiltshire Council.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

10. There is no identified environmental or climate change impacts from the proposal in this report.

Financial Implications

11. Neither of the proposed recommended changes will impact on the council's general fund. However, the amendment relating to those over pensionable age being able to bid for 1 or 2 bed accommodation is likely to help reduce void times for our housing providers for 2 bed sheltered and bungalow accommodation.

Legal Implications

12. These recommendations have been discussed with legal and no legal implications have been identified

Options

13. The two options considered are:

1. To make no amendments to the existing allocation policy.

This would mean we would not be taking forward the recommendation contained within the Peer Review and does not take on board the requests from housing providers and those of state of retirement age. 2 bed bungalows would continue to be difficult to let and we would not be taking on board the councils desire to enable older people to move into accommodation that they could remain in as their care needs increase

2. Adopt the proposed changes

See reason for proposal

Reason for Proposal

14. The proposed policy amendments are required in response to a number of recommendations from those over state retirement age who have requested to move into 2 bed sheltered or bungalow accommodation but who have not been able too, as well as a recommendation from housings recent Peer Review who have suggested we review our allocations policy in regard to older people and the ability for them to be able to bid for 2 bed properties.

Proposal

15. It is recommended that through delegated authority the Cabinet member for Housing, Leisure, Libraries and flooding approves the following amendment.
1. To introduce the ability for those over state retirement age to bid for 1 or 2 bed accommodation. Section 7.2 and Appendix 2 of the policy would include the following additional text:

As the bedroom standard does not apply to those over pensionable age, those over pensionable age will be able to apply for either a 1 or 2 bedroom property.

2. To introduce the ability for us to determine local connection for the allocation of extra care units in a different way to ensure that those in more rural locations are not disadvantaged. Section 9.1 of the policy would include the following additional text:

However for extra care properties the local connection criteria will be defined within the extra care procedure to ensure that those in rural locations are not unfairly disadvantaged as all extra care schemes are located in a town.

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Date of report: 15th January 2016

Appendices

Appendix A: Homes4Wiltshire policy