

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee 5 November 2013

Housing Allocations Policy – rapid scrutiny exercise

Purpose

1. To report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee the outcome of the rapid scrutiny exercise held on 28 October 2013 on the proposed revisions to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.

Background

2. On 28 February the Committee received a presentation from Nicole Smith, Head of Strategic Housing, about changes in national legislation that required a review of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy. Extensive consultation was undertaken including with Area Boards ending on 26 April and it was agreed that the outcome of the consultation would be reported back to the Committee prior to a final decision by Cabinet on 21 November.
3. As reported at the last meeting, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman (and Scrutiny Manager) met with the Cabinet Portfolio-holder and the Head of Strategic Housing for an initial briefing on 7 October. It was agreed to undertake a one-off rapid scrutiny exercise on the matter with an invitation extended to all members of the Management Committee.
4. The following were present:

Cllr Simon Killane (who led the exercise)
Cllr Roy While
Cllr Jeff Osborn
Cllr Jacqui Lay
Cllr Richard Clewer, Portfolio-holder for Housing
Nicole Smith, Head of Strategic Housing
Paul Kelly, Scrutiny Manager
5. The following papers were made available at the meeting:

- Draft Housing Allocation Policy
- Corporate Leadership Team Briefing Paper (September 2013)
- Consultation Questionnaire – responses
- Government Guidance on Providing Social Housing for Local People – October 2013

Deliberations

6. Nicole Smith introduced the revised Policy and highlighted the major changes. These were prompted by the opportunity to review the policy by the Localism Act 2011 and the outcome of an extensive local consultation exercise. Cllr Clewer posed a number of questions to the scrutiny members relating to the more challenging aspects within the draft Policy where the Council had some discretion.

The following issues were discussed:

- The scale of and reliance on the results of the consultation exercise
- Proposed eligibility and exclusion criteria including the definition of a local connection to Wiltshire and forms of unacceptable behaviour
- Property size criteria
- The revised banding structure including removal of the current bronze band
- The implications on the Policy of Central Government strengthening statutory guidance on social housing allocations
- Timetable including Cabinet and potentially Full Council approval
- Publicising and communicating the changes.

Conclusions

7. The Councillors acknowledged the major task that had been undertaken in reviewing this prominent policy and the efforts made to seek the views of all interested parties including existing tenants and those currently on the waiting list, and the engagement of elected members through area boards.
8. The result was a series of important changes driven by Central Government direction and local measures design to deliver a fairer and more realistic housing allocation service.

Recommendation

9. To support the revised Housing Allocations Policy as appended to this report for approval by Cabinet on 21 November subject to the following being taken into account:
- To support the benefit of seeking a common allocations policy among all social housing providers in Wiltshire
 - To change the description of the banding structure to a letter or number classification in order to signify that current arrangements have been extensively revised
 - To provide a graphical presentation of the process in the form of a flowchart
 - To allow local connection to also mean officially recognised neighbourhoods as defined within an adopted neighbourhood plan encompassing more than one parish.
 - To rename the new “expression of interest” category to better reflect that it no longer forms part of the revised Policy
 - To submit a further appendix to Cabinet and Council highlighting where the changes have been made within the banding structure.
 - To utilise the Council’s hubs and new campus provision to improve access to housing services
 - To support an extensive housing newsletter for stakeholders and councillors

Cllr Simon Killane, Lead Member for the Rapid Scrutiny Exercise

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Housing Allocation Policy

Background documents

Corporate Leadership Team Briefing Paper (September 2013)

Consultation Questionnaire – responses

Government Guidance on Providing Social Housing for Local People – October 2013