

**CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS**  
**15th October, 2012**

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Goulty and Kaye (Policy Advisors).

**J30. ALLOCATIONS REVIEW AND STRATEGIC TENANCY POLICY UPDATE**

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted an interim report outlining progress and proposals regarding the revision of the Authority's Allocation of Council Housing and Strategic Tenancy Policies.

Strategic Tenancy Policy

Legislation enacted through the Localism Act placed a duty on all local authority landlords to produce such a Policy setting out the broad objectives to be taken into consideration by affordable housing providers operating within that local authority area.

The Policy must state whether the Authority planned to issue Fixed Term Tenancies, the circumstances in which they would be issued, how tenants could appeal against such and what would happen when the Fixed Term Tenancy came to an end.

Whilst there were potential advantages of offering temporary housing support to a greater number of Rotherham's households through the use of such a Tenancy, it would not be appropriate for the Borough. There was an ongoing need to support sustainability in neighbourhoods and issuing such tenancies to households with no long term interest in a community would undermine sustainability.

However, the issuing of such a tenancy could be beneficial when allocating new tenants to larger family housing i.e. properties with 4 or more bedrooms. This would enable larger families to have security of tenure whilst their children were still living at home:-

- Length of tenancy would vary depending upon the age of the applicant's children but could extend to an 18 year Fixed Term Tenancy with the option to offer a second if required
- Applicants would be aware of the temporary nature of the tenancy prior to bidding
- Households would remain Council tenants at the close of their temporary tenancy but would be offered a permanent secure tenancy in a smaller property in the area of their choice where possible.

Discussion ensued with the following points raised:-

- o A family could potentially already have 4 children before they were allocated a larger property - at the end of the 18 year Fixed Term Tenancy the eldest child could be in their 20's
- o Extending it to include 3 bedroom houses would create issues with regard to the available number of 1 and 2 bedroom properties for tenants to move into
- o Could it be used in cases of anti-social behaviour?

- Demotion of Tenancies

#### Allocations Policy

As of 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2012, there were 27,243 applicants on Rotherham housing register with only 1,800 properties being quit and re-let each year. Consideration was being given to the application of locally determined criteria in order to manage the 73% (approximately 20,000) registered applicants who did not bid, save resources in sending out annual review letters and cut down on the administration time for those households who did not require rehousing.

Potential options included:-

- Applicants not in housing need move onto a non-active register – would not require an annual review – but they would not accrue waiting time. They would be offered housing advice and their application could be moved back onto the active register
- Not accepting applications from those households adequately housed and did not meet the statutory or locally determined criteria. These could include those who submit an application ‘just in case’ or secure a Council house on retirement
- Granting transfer for existing tenants only when they were in housing need or when the transfer would benefit the Council
- Offer a level of priority to low income households to assist households who were struggling to manage in private rented accommodation but did not meet a statutory need

Discussion ensued with the following points raised:-

- Applicants had previously been encouraged to place their names on the waiting list
- If a clause was included that they had to bid every 12 months whether they wished to seek a property or not, would result in an increase in administration
- Good idea to have a non-active register but the non-accrual of time was an issue
- Should the application form include a question asking for the reason why they wanted to apply?
- Accept those who could no longer afford to run their property and the Council buy it from them – result in increased number of miscellaneous properties and maintenance costs

Resolved:- That a briefing paper, taking into consideration the points made above, be circulated to all Members inviting comments.

### **J31. HOUSING CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE UPDATE**

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the operational difficulties experienced recently in the Housing Customer Contact Centre which had impacted negatively upon the delivery of Customer Services to agreed Service Standards and performance together with the key issues identified which had impacted upon the Service and the remedial actions implemented.

Staff within the Housing Customer Contact Centre handled customer enquiries on a range of non-repair housing issues as well as providing administrative support for defined areas of the Service including Rent Recovery, Key Choices and Housing Management.

There had been a high level of staff turnover amongst the Customer Services Assistants which the recruitment process had struggled to keep pace with. This had coincided with an increase in call volumes.

A number of measures had been implemented in order to address Service pressures including drawing on staff support from other areas of the Service to support call handling and administration and Housing Champions providing cover on a rota basis.

Following implementation of the actions, performance had improved significantly with reductions in abandoned call ratios and call waiting times.

The inclusion of the Housing Champions had also had a number of other benefits including:-

- Customers able to access advice from a Housing Champion at the first point of contact rather than having to schedule appointments
- Improve the overall awareness and understanding of roles and responsibilities between Housing Champions and Customer Service Assistants
- A much clearer understanding about the processes that were in place and the role each respective officer played in making sure the Service functioned efficiently
- Provided opportunities for Customer Service Assistants to gain on the job experience from their more experienced counterparts
- Provide opportunities to create efficiencies in the Service by identifying and removing any possible duplication between the 2 respective roles.

Discussion ensued on the arrangements that had been put into place. It was felt that the inclusion of the Housing Champions had been very successful and should continue on a rota basis.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.