

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>27<sup>th</sup> July 2009</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Housing Allocation Policy - progress update and review of Local Lettings Policies</b>
4.	<b>Programme Area:</b>	<b>Neighbourhoods and Adult Services</b>

### 5. Summary

This report details progress since the implementation of the new Allocation Policy which was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008, and includes the outcome of the 6 month review of the Local Lettings Policies.

### 6. Recommendations:

- That the Cabinet Member notes the progress update within the report
- That the Cabinet Member agrees to the changes in the Local Lettings Policies for the period August 2009 – end of March 2010. These are that an additional 461 properties are now proposed as requiring a Local Lettings Policy and 11 properties are proposed to be withdrawn and reverted back to the normal letting arrangements. The details are set out in Appendix 2.

## 7. Background and Detail

7.1 The New Housing Allocation Policy was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008. The Allocation Policy determines eligibility for council housing, it is also focussed on assisting people in urgent housing need with the introduction of the Priority Plus group and the General Plus group. Alongside the new Policy the Housing Register was reviewed. Since December 2008, the numbers registered have increased from **17,000** in December 2008 to **19,298** as at 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009. Of these there are **currently 60 Priority Plus, 1600 Priority, 750 General Plus and 16888 General applications**. The progress being made on the key areas of change are as follows:

7.2 Under the new policy, all applicants are required to bid for properties, with no one being “matched” to suitable specific properties. The Housing Assessment team have reviewed their procedures and now undertake more case load management, enabling them to have more capacity to provide support to customers to ensure that they are actively bidding for suitable properties. In addition, a Scrutiny Review of “Choice Based Lettings (CBL)” took place between April and May 2009 which examined current CBL practices and made recommendations for improvements that could be made to the service from a customer’s perspective. There was also a separate Scrutiny Review of the “Void Process”, which examined the process of turnaround of void properties. These are separate from the Allocation Policy but are clearly linked. The findings of the reviews are in the process of being referred to the Cabinet for comments and relevant staff from RMBC and 2010 Rotherham Ltd will be reviewing the recommendations and forming an action plan on the 30<sup>th</sup> July 09.

7.3 Quotas were set for advertising properties with all vacant properties to be offered first to those placing bids from the Priority Plus group. These are restricted to those assessed by the Housing Assessment Panel as requiring immediate re-housing. Only if there are no Priority Plus applicants will the property be offered to the group which the property has been advertised to. The quotas set for advertising were 50% to the Priority Group, 40% General Plus and 10 % to the General Group. Between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008 and 7th June 2009, **805** properties were advertised and **796** properties have been let as follows:

	Target advertising & letting quota	% of properties advertised by Priority group <sup>1</sup>	Number of properties let	% of Properties let by Group
Priority Plus	n/a	n/a	49	6%
Priority	50%	48 %	367	46%
General Plus	40%	43 %	157	20%
General	10%	8 %	223	28%

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<sup>1</sup> Each of the 97 management areas in Rotherham applies the quota locally defined by locality, property type and bedroom size. This will mean that the target may not be 100% met as it depends on what properties become available for advertising per area.

**7.4** There are differences in the % of lettings made compared to the quotas used for advertising properties. This appears to be because a large proportion of lettings at the end of 2008 were made during period under the old policy as a result of a backlog of properties awaiting allocation which had been advertised prior to the introduction of the new policy. Following the introduction of new working arrangements and reorganisation of staff by the Empty Homes Team within 2010 Rotherham Ltd, this backlog has now been cleared. A further explanation is that where there are no applicants bidding for properties in the General Plus band, the property is offered to households who bid from the General band.

**7.5** New terms of reference were agreed for the Housing Assessment Panel which has been meeting on a weekly basis to consider cases that have been referred by Housing Officers from 2010 Rotherham Ltd or Neighbourhoods and Adult Services, in line with the Allocation Policy. The terms of reference are attached at **Appendix 1**. The table below details the outcomes of the cases heard.

<b>Month of weekly Panel meetings</b>	<b>Number of cases agreed for Priority Plus</b>	<b>Number of cases refused Priority Plus Status</b>	<b>Number of cases Deferred</b>
January 09	12	6	0
February 09	16	2	1
March 09	19	1	6
April 09	15	1	3
May 09	22	1	1
June 09	9	6	1
<b>total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>

**7.6 Local Lettings Policies** were also implemented in December 2008 and these have been reviewed - led by 2010 Rotherham Ltd in consultation with Elected Members, Safer Neighbourhood teams and Community groups through the Area Assembly Coordinating groups. Consultation has also been undertaken with residents. The review has identified an additional 461 properties recommended for Local Lettings policy, with 11 properties being proposed to be removed. As at 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 there are 20,968 properties in the Council's housing stock. This will bring the total of properties with a Local Lettings Policy up to 2,096 which is 9.9% of the available stock, up from 7.7% that are subject to Local Lettings Policies now.

**7.7** Any recommendations for additions have been justified by supporting evidence, and where there has been significant improvement in sustainability such as reduced abandoned properties, evictions and reported crime it is proposed that the Local Lettings Policy be removed. It also became apparent that some properties were missed in the first review. These included blocks of flats such as Rockingham House and Wellfield Lodge, where the neighbouring residents are predominantly older people. Additions to the proposed revised Local Lettings Policies have only been applied if there is supporting evidence in the following circumstances:

- **Housing Management Difficulties** – where a certain street or blocks have experienced management problems due to anti social behaviour, or where tenancies have failed due to high levels of estate management difficulties in the last 6 months.
- **Age Restrictions** – where Neighbouring Residents are predominantly older people Where age restrictions apply they are subject to a declining age threshold so eventually age restrictions will disappear allowing the area to develop into a properly balanced community. The age threshold will be reviewed every 6 months by 2010 Rotherham Ltd and any changes will be made in consultation with Elected Members, Safer Neighbourhood teams and Community groups through the Area Assembly Coordinating groups.

The proposed changes for period 1/8/09 to 31/03/10 are detailed in **Appendix 2**.

## **8. Finance**

**8.1** Improvements to both the indicators linked to how well properties are turned around, facilitated by the Allocation Policy. The relevant PIs are currently top quartile and improving. As at 31<sup>st</sup> June 2009 rent loss through voids was 1.94% and average re-let times was 24.61 days.

**8.2** By focusing on meeting urgent housing need will reduce time periods in the Priority and Priority Plus Group which in turn will reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation. This will enable a cost saving to the Council will allow a reduction in the temporary properties of accommodation currently needed for homelessness families. Similarly there are savings made by offering suitable accommodation to urgent cases with medical needs by reducing the cost of care provision and adaptations.

**8.4** By applying Local Lettings Policies to a limited part of the local authorities stock, it is hoped this will assist in creating more sustainable communities and less property turnover. However there is a slight risk that empty properties may take longer to let as some policies are quite restrictive.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

**9.1** The current demand for social rented housing is high which translates to pressures on the housing register. There has also been an increase in

households in urgent housing need who are affected financially by the economic downturn. The existing quotas seem to be adequate in meeting the needs of households in urgent housing need. However these will need to be monitored in the next six months to establish whether the advertising quotas need to be altered to reflect local need.

- 9.2** Any change to the Allocation Policy must ensure that the needs of vulnerable and hard to reach groups are addressed, and the Council's statutory obligations are met. The Allocation Policy must be delivered in a transparent way to ensure it is fair, and seen to be fair.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

- 10.1** The Allocation Policy is delivered at a local level and via the Key Choices Property Shop and Neighbourhood Offices, which supports the Council's commitment to providing greater accessibility to services, meeting social needs by helping to ensure a better quality of life, improving fair access and choice, protecting, keeping safe vulnerable people and specifically addresses the diversity agenda, by tailoring services to the needs of hard to reach groups. Working to improve services for Rotherham people and to ensure more effective links to the Rotherham 'Proud' theme.

*Rotherham people, businesses and pride in the borough are at the heart of our vision. Rotherham will have a positive external image and its people will be renowned for their welcome, friendliness and commitment to the values of social justice. Active citizenship and democracy will underpin how Rotherham works. Achievements and diversity will be celebrated. Rotherham will be a caring place, where the most vulnerable are supported. It will be made up of strong, sustainable and cohesive communities, both of place and interest and there will be many opportunities for people to be involved in civic life and local decision making. The means to do this will be clear, well known and accessible.*

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

- 11.1** The review of the Local Lettings Policies has been led by 2010 Rotherham Ltd has involved consultation with elected members, customers, legal services, partners and staff.

- The Allocation Policy (1st December 2008)
- Local Lettings Policies (1<sup>st</sup> December 2008)
- The Homelessness Act 2002.
- Housing Act 1996, Parts VI and VII
- The Code Of Guidance in Allocation [CLG 2007]
- The Homelessness Code of Guidance

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## Appendix 1

### Terms of Reference of the Housing Assessment Panel - December 2008

- (i) The Housing Assessment Panel will consider all cases in terms of whether to award Priority Plus in line with the Allocation Policy. The panel **WILL NOT** consider any case that falls outside of the Allocation Policy provisions.

Applicants who are awarded Priority Plus are entitled to one successful offer.

The panel will only consider the following cases:

- Individuals who are in hospital, ready for discharge but unable to return to their home
- People subject to Multi- agency Risk Assessment Conferences such as MARAC meetings
- Individual cases considered by Housing Assessment Panel or Risk Management Panel where there are issues regarding Safeguarding Adults or Children that require immediate re-housing, this would include urgent moves associated with antisocial behaviour.
- Public Protection – High Risk Offenders subject to MAPPA, before an offer of accommodation approval of be sought from MAPPA Housing Management Lettings, such as decants due to fire or floods.
- Applicants with 2 priorities such as individuals who are homeless and have a health problem
- People living in regeneration areas where there is less than 25% of the housing remaining occupied
- Households that have been moved from the Priority Group because they have been statutory homeless for more than 6 months and have been actively bidding in Key Choices. These households will receive 1 offer only in the Priority Plus group but are still entitled to 2 offers in total. If both of these offers are refused then the Homeless duty will be discharged.
- Individuals living in Supported People funded accommodation who have been ready to live Independently for more than 6 months
- Ex offenders who wish to voluntary terminate their Council tenancy on sentencing as their prison sentence is more than 12 months. Housing Assessment Panel will consider the voluntary termination. If the Housing Assessment Panel agrees to a Priority Plus status the application will be re-dated to the date of the panel meeting and will become eligible one month prior to being released from prison.
- Households tied to a tenancy within their employment and individuals in HM Forces. If the household is faced with homelessness on discharge or termination of employment the Housing Assessment Panel will consider their application for one of the preference groups ( Priority Plus, Priority or General Plus)

## Protocols of the Panel and delegated powers

The Housing Assessment Panel will meet weekly. However where urgent consideration is required on individual cases between Panel meetings urgent delegated powers are given to the Housing Choices Manager. The decisions taken outside of the Housing Assessment Panel meetings will be made in line with the Allocation Policy and in consultation with the Director of Independent Living or the Housing Options Manager. In cases where urgent delegated powers have been utilised a summary of the case and action taken will be reported to the next Housing Assessment Panel for ratification of the action taken.

Where households are placed in the Priority Plus Group the household will bid in Key Choices and be made 1 offer – where the household is homeless 2 offers will apply. Offers of accommodation will be dependent on confirmation that Care and Support Services are provided and funded where necessary. Vulnerable customers will be supporting in the bidding process by either a Medical Assessment Officer, a Housing Solutions Officer or a 2010 Rotherham Ltd Neighbourhood Champion.

## Membership and Roles of Housing Assessment Panel

Membership and roles of the panel will consist of the following:

<b>Panel Member</b>	<b>Role of Panel Member</b>	
Housing Choices Manager	Chair	Makes decisions
Housing Options Manager	Chair	Makes decisions
Housing Options Coordinator	Chair	Makes decisions
2010 Neighbourhood Champion	Presents the case	
Housing Solutions or Assessment	Presents the case	
Specialist Officers, Support Workers	Presents the case	
Housing Options Officer	Minute Taker	
Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods or Cabinet Member Advisor	Makes decisions	
Elected Members (x 2 from different wards) Elected Members must apply to Cabinet Member to be on the panel	Makes decisions	
Officers from Neighbourhoods and Adult Services	Makes decisions	
Officers from Children and Young People Services	Makes decisions	
Legal Services	Advisory role	

**Note:**

When cases being considered are from the Ward of an Elected Member representative on the Panel or within the boundaries, the Elected Member should retire from the meeting whilst the case is being considered; this will also apply if the case being considered is a family member of any panel member.

The Housing Assessment Panel meeting will be cancelled if there are less than 4 decision makers in attendance.

**The role of the Chair**

The meetings will be chaired by either the Housing Options Manager, Housing Options Coordinator or the Housing Choices Manager, minutes will be taken by Housing Options Officer.

The Chair will ensure:

- that the panel remains focused on the cases being considered.
- that decisions are made in accordance to the Allocation Policy
- the agenda is adhered to, provide procedural guidance, facilitate information sharing and discussion between all Panel members.
- clear decisions and recommendations are reached which are consistent with Allocation Scheme and the provisions held within Housing Act, 1996, Part VI and VII.
- the panel is assisted in addressing issues related to anti-discrimination practice.

**The role of the Presenting Officer**

- In preparing the report, the author should discuss the content of the report with the applicant and seek consent for the details within it to be discussed by the Panel. (The applicant would not be required to attend the meeting)
- Supportive information from agencies involved with the applicant should be provided with the report. In such cases the agency should be advised that supportive information will be shared with the Panel.
- Cases referred to the panel will be made on the Housing Assessment Panel template and the reports will be forwarded to the Key Choices Team, who co-ordinate the cases. The Presenting Officer must provide all information prior to the meeting. Where further information is requested the report will not be presented until the report is completed



- The Presenting Officer will verbally advise the Panel Members the background of the report, and the reasons why a Priority Plus status is requested.

### **The role of the decision makers**

In considering cases referred to the Panel each case will be considered on its merit. The panel members will have due regard to:

- Confidentiality
- Consistency of approach
- Adherence to Allocation Policy and legislation
- Address individual need
- Equality Standards and non discrimination

The decision makers of the panel may ask the officers who are presenting the case to retire from the panel meeting whilst a decision is being considered. In some instances cases may be deferred for further information.

In most instances the decision will be reached following each individual case. The applicant will be advised of the decision in writing within 7 working days of the panel.

### **Administration of the Panel**

The Key Choices team will ensure that:

- Prior to the meeting that all relevant information has been gathered.
- The agenda is set.
- Invitations are sent to the panel members.
- The meeting venue is booked.
- Notes are taken during the meeting; the minutes will be filed with the individual case records.
- Applicants are informed of the decision in writing in 7 working days
- The housing application category is amended where the panel has agreed a Priority Plus award.
- All case papers are retained by the Key Choices team. In cases where the report is Council tenant information regarding the case will also be stored in the tenancy file.

All cases referred to the Housing Assessment Panel must be on a standard report template together with a completed "Checklist" and the tenancy file for Council tenants.

**Checklist for Cases for Consideration by Housing Assessment Panel  
Neighbourhoods and Adult Services.**

**The Housing Assessment Panel has strict criteria which means that all of the details (where applicable) must be completed before the case will be considered. Please email the checklist and the report to:  
[keychocies@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:keychocies@rotherham.gov.uk)**

**For Council tenancies the tenancy file must be provided.**

**Case referred by ..... Contact telephone .....**

**Date referred .....**

**The applicant must be advised that the report has been referred. Please confirm that the applicant has been made aware YES/NO**

Applicant .....

Address .....

1. Is all the Housing Assessment Report fully completed? YES/NO

2. Has other housing options being advised YES/NO

3. What housing options are been advised? .....

.....

4. Are there are issues of anti social behaviour? YES/ No.

If No please move to next question

If Yes the panel will require supporting evidence from the:

- Tenancy File
- SNT involvement
- 2010 Champion
- Anti Social behaviour team
- Police Incident Numbers

5. Are there are Safeguarding issues for Children or Adults? YES/NO

If No please move to next question

If Yes the panel will require supporting evidence from:

- Children and Young People's Service ( Social Services)
- Adult Services ( Social Worker)

7. Are there are medical reasons? YES/NO

If No please move to next question  
If Yes the panel will require supporting evidence from the:

- Assessment team
- Mental health services

8. Are there are learning difficulties or disabilities? YES/NO

If No please move to next question  
If Yes the panel will require supporting evidence from:

- Learning and Disabilities
- Support agencies

9. Are there are drug or alcohol issues? YES/NO

If No please move to next question  
If Yes the panel will require supporting evidence from:

- Drug Intervention team
- Clearways
- Support Worker.

10. Where the applicant has two reasonable preferences, the panel will require confirmation that the assessment has been undertaken by 2 seperate services, i.e Duty under homeless and medical priority. Please list the 2 reasonable preference categories:

- Reasonable preference 1 .....Date awarded.....
- Reasonable preference 2 .....Date awarded.....

11. Where the case has been considered by multi agency panels such as MARAC or MAPPA include:

- Date of meeting .....
- Decision of MARAC .....
- Decision of MAPPA .....

12. Emergency Prohibition Order

- Date of Emergency Prohibition Order and copy attached .....

13. Bed Blocking

- Medical Assessment date and decision .....

.....  
14. Households that have been moved from the Priority Group because they have been homeless for more than 6 months and have been actively bidding in Key Choices.

- Date of homeless acceptance .....
- Are they living in temporary accommodation YES/NO
- Date placed in temporary accommodation if applicable.....
- Attach bidding and shortlists YES/NO

15. Individuals living in Supported accommodation who have been ready to live independently for more than 6 months

- Date of Priority .....
- Date placed supported accommodation
- Attach bidding and shortlists YES/NO

16. Housing Assessment Panel will consider ex offenders who wish to voluntary terminate their Council tenancy on sentencing as their prison sentence is more than 12 months.

- Length of tenancy .....
- The voluntary termination is attached YES/NO
- Length of prison sentence .....

17. Is the case due to be considered as a temporary move due to a fire or flood or repair which cannot be undertaken whilst the household is living in the property. YES/NO

- Length of time property is expected to be empty .....
- Details of repairs .....

18. Is the case to be considered for a permanent move following a temporary placement? YES/NO

- Length of time of the temporary address
- Reason why the tenant would like to remain
- Demand for temporary and secure tenancy

19. Is the case to be presented for another reason? YES/NO

- Details included in the panel report

Date Received by Housing Options Team .....

Date of panel meeting .....

If the report is incomplete, date referred back for additional information .....

Details of further information .....

.....  
.....

Date represented to the Housing Options team .....

Date of Panel Meeting .....

**Case for Consideration by Housing Assessment Panel, Neighbourhoods and Adult Services**

<b>Case prepared by</b>	
<b>Applicant</b>	
<b>Address (area only)</b>	
<b>Family Details</b>	
<b>Present Accommodation</b>	
<b>Category and Date of Application</b>	
<b>Rent Account</b>	
<b>Ward Members</b>	
<b>Length of Time at Present Address</b>	
<b><u>Reason for Presenting Case</u></b>	
<b>Details of Circumstances</b>	
<b>Appendix Attached</b>	
<b>Area requested for re-housing and reasons</b>	
<b>Waiting list for area requested/property type including turnover in last 12 months</b>	
<b>Demand for present accommodation</b>	
<b>Proposal(s) for consideration</b>	
<b>Decision</b>	Agreed/Deferred/No Action/Noted
<b>Comments</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Case considered by</b>	
<b>Letter to applicant notifying decision</b>	
<b>If this is a Council Tenant File the case notes in the Tenancy File</b>	