

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel
2. Date:	28th October 2010
3. Title:	Local Lettings for New Build Council Housing and subsequent Lettings
4. Programme Area:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

The use of Local Lettings Policies was agreed in December 2008 and these are reviewed every six months. This new Local Letting Policy has been led by the Neighbourhood Investment team in partnership with 2010 Rotherham Ltd. Consultation has been undertaken with Elected Members, Safer Neighbourhood investment team teams and residents including Community groups through the Area Assembly Coordinating groups. Consultation has also been undertaken with Legal Services which suggests that wider consultation should take place on the proposal.

6. Recommendations

Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel is part of the wider consultation on the proposed Local Lettings Policy for New Build housing, feedback from the consultation will be presented in a final report back to Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Communities before the end of November 2010.

7. Proposals and Detail

7.1 The use of Local Lettings Policies was initially agreed together with the Allocation Policy in December 2008. In 2009 the Local Authority was successful in attaining funding for the development and building of new Council Housing. The successful bid was to support the development of 127 new Council homes for rent. These included 36 properties at Wood Street/School Street in Thrybergh, 29 properties at Albert Road, West Melton, 29 properties at Rother View, Canklow, 21 properties at Albany Road, Kilnhurst, 8 properties at Newlands Avenue, Maltby, and 4 properties at Stone Park Close in Maltby. In total there are a 5 properties for disabled people on Wood Street (1) Albert Road (2) Newlands Avenue ((2). All the new homes will be available for social rent through Key Choices and will be managed and maintained by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. The properties at Wood Street are expected to be ready for letting in March 2011.

7.2 All of the new homes will meet high quality design standards and Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Housing resulting in a quality residential social housing offer. It is important to ensure that all of the schemes are looked after by the new tenants, that there is compliance with the tenancy agreement and the estate(s) do not suffer from anti social behaviour. Therefore it is proposed that any prospective tenant must comply with the local letting policy detailed in **Appendix 1**. The proposed local lettings will be closely monitored and reviewed in six months time following the date of the first lettings. i.e. If the date of the first letting is March 2011 the review date will be September 2011.

7.3 The Right to Buy for Council tenants still applies with the exception of the Disabled Persons Units. Any subsequent capital receipts are to be made available for the Local Authority to recycle, possibly for further new build.

7.4 It is proposed that all of the 127 properties will be advertised in accordance with the normal advertising quotas and be let in accordance with the proposed Local Lettings Policy as follows:

All properties will only be offered to the **existing Council tenant transfer applicants** who have held a Council tenancy in Rotherham for the past 2 years and whom have a clear rent account and no housing management issues i.e. – history of anti social behaviour, property damage or misuse etc.

For those qualifying applicants, the approach to be followed is:

- All properties initially offered to Priority Plus applicants and then 50% to the Priority Group, 30% to the General Plus Group and 20% to the General Group.
- Of these lettings, approximately 10% of the total (13 properties) will be let to people who are employed. This will be based on either the main or joint applicant whom must be employed or self employed when the offer of accommodation is made. Tenants who lose their employment status after moving in will not be expected to leave the accommodation.

7.5 The following types of households will therefore be excluded from applying:

- Housing Association tenants
- Private Rented tenants
- People who are statutory homeless
- Home owners
- Applicants on the Housing Register living with friends or relatives

The proposed policy is designed to give preference to Council tenants and release existing council properties to other applicants on the housing register.

8. Finance

8.1 It is hoped that Local Lettings Policies will create more sustainable communities, which should lead to fewer empty properties (voids) on that particular estate. However there is high risk that empty properties may take longer to let due to a restrictive local lettings policy. The average cost of void repairs is £1950, with additional costs for the letting process including staff time to produce the advert, the shortlist, verify the application, undertaking the viewing, making the offer and sign up procedure.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

9.1 There are a number of risks in respect of having the proposed Local Letting Policy. There is the potential for the property to take longer to let as there will need to be some promotional activity to encourage transfer applicants to register to move to the new build areas as current information suggests the transfer rate could be low:

Area	Numbers of Transfer applications that have noted this area as their first choice	Percentage of the total Transfers %
Thrybergh	99	2.67 %
Maltby	33	0.89%
Canklow	26	0.70%
Kilnhurst	16	0.43%
West Melton	20	0.54%

The total numbers of transfers registered as at 1 August 2010 is 3,695, of these 501 are registered in the Priority group, 136 are in the General Plus group and 3,058 are in the General Group.

9.2 There is no 100% guarantee that previous Council tenants with a good tenancy record will not have housing management problems into the future. An alternative approach would be to obtain a reference for any applicant from a their current employer or landlord (not just Council transfer tenants), or even a guarantor, that could go some way to also ensuring that applicants were likely to adhere to the terms of their tenancy agreement.

9.3 The legal advice received suggests that the Council should undertake wider consultation on the Local Letting Policy being proposed given the departure from the Councils current Allocation Policy. The consultation will prevent any future challenges from applicants who are not currently Council tenants, or from those who will be excluded such as vulnerable applicants who may be represented by the local community and voluntary sector.

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 Legal Services have been advised that the proposed policy represents a major change to the current Housing Allocation Policy and therefore wider consultation should take place to enable other Housing organizations locally to be given the opportunity to comment. It is therefore proposed that a consultation programmed is drawn up before the policy is finalized and the outcomes fed back to the Cabinet Member by the end of November 2010.

The proposed timeline will be as follows:

- **Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods** - Local Lettings Policy initially approved by mid September 10

- **Sustainable Scrutiny Panel** - Local Letting Policies distributed mid September 10
- **Equality Impact Assessment completed** - end of September 2010
- **Local Consultation with Community groups, Local Residents and Local Ward Members** Local lettings Policies distributed at Community meetings end September with a deadline of end of October to return comments/views.
- **Housing Associations** - Local lettings Policies distributed end September with a deadline of end of October to return comments/views.
- **Support Providers assisting customers who are in need of rehousing** - Local lettings Policies distributed end September with a deadline for end of October to return comments/views.
- **Advice and Advocacy agencies including Speak Up, Shelter Citizens Advice Bureau** - Local lettings Policies distributed end September with a deadline for end of October to return comments/views.
- **Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods** - Local Lettings Policy consultation findings brought back to at the end of November 10

The finding of the Local Consultation so far - Tenant organisations, members of the local community and Ward Members have already been invited to comment. Statutory consultation has also taken place as part of the planning application process. At all stages of the consultation, Members and residents have expressed concerns about the management of the properties. The need for additional support and management of the properties as well as careful allocation of new tenants was understood to be essential in settling new residents into these existing areas.

Background papers have included:

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

Contact Name:

Sandra Tolley, Housing Choices Manager, ext (33) 6561,
sandra.tolley@rotherham.gov.uk