

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

1.	Meeting	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date	26th November 2012
3.	Title	Review of Local Letting Policies
4.	Directorate	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

Local letting policies were first implemented in Rotherham in December 2008 and these have been reviewed annually.

This report details progress since the last review and also includes recommendations for further additions and removal.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet Member:

- **NOTES PROGRESS MADE AND AGREES THE AMENDMENTS TO THE LOCAL LETTING POLICY AS DETAILED IN APPENDIX 1**

7. Proposals and details

7.1 Local letting Policies set out how properties may be allocated in a way that is different to the usual Allocation Policy. Applicants with an evidenced history of housing management difficulties can be excluded from properties through the application of a local lettings policy; this is set out in Section 167 of the Housing Act 1996. In some cases this may mean that people on the housing register with lower priority may be housed before those with higher priority, but this will always be for a particular reason. We use local lettings policies for a number of reasons, for example: where an area would benefit from more stability, where there have been a high number of tenants moving out, where new flats or houses have been built and we feel that a new community needs to be established.

7.2 A local lettings policy will usually give the percentage of properties which will be offered to any particular group of people, so that there will still be an opportunity for those in the greatest housing need to be housed as well. We will still advertise vacancies in Key Choices, but will show in the advert that a local lettings policy will be used. The position now is that as at 20 September 2012 there are 20,811 properties in the Council's stock and 3221 properties have local lettings policy criteria applied when advertised. This means that 15.28% of the Council's housing stock will be advertised with a local letting policy.

7.3 The proposed changes for period 01/11/2012 to 01/05/2013 are detailed in Appendix 1; additions are highlighted in green, removals in yellow. There are several types of local letting criteria; this document seeks to bring all local letting policy criteria onto one document.

7.4 Any recommendations for additions have been justified by supporting evidence, such as abandoned properties, evictions, reported crime and tenancy issues. Changes have also been informed by consultation led by Neighbourhood Management with Elected Members, Safer Neighbourhood teams and Community groups through the Area Assembly Coordinating groups. Consultation has also been undertaken with residents, external partners and agencies and the voluntary sector as part of the consultation on the Housing Strategy, Allocation Policy and the Localism Act 2011. Appendix 3 details the overall objective and criteria/evidence that was taken into account, the Local Ward Members who were consulted and when the consultation took place.

7.5 As part of the consultation process local letting policies have been discussed with the police public protection unit and Rookwood bail hostel. These services, which are part of the MAPPA arrangements, raised concerns that one of the local letting policy criteria excludes applicants who cannot demonstrate good behaviour in the community for the last 12 months. This means that applicants released on licence are excluded from areas with a local letting policy. A number of applicants who have licence conditions have no accommodation and have a medical need and therefore need to be rehoused sometimes in adapted housing which they are currently excluded from in terms of the local letting policy. The risk is that ex offenders are released from prison or Rookwood with no fixed address these cases are ultimately difficult for the police to manage and any risk to the community is increased. It is therefore proposed that each case (subject to MAPPA arrangements) will be

considered individually and procedures put in place to work more closely with Rookwood on such cases. Rookwood will highlight when the applicant moves into Rookwood so a medical assessment can be undertaken, each case will then be discussed by both the housing assessment panel and housing management. Rookwood will include housing and conducting tenancies as part of an applicant's induction to Rookwood. The police public protection unit manage offenders of this nature; this joint working protocol will ensure that rehousing is appropriate in order to reduce any risk to the community.

7.6 Progress and Proposed changes

In order to create sustainable communities it is proposed that local letting policies will be changed to adopt the following principles:

- To include and consider information about all household members, not just the primary applicant.
- Improve the processes and communication with the police to obtain information on convictions. Previously the police only gave information on the seven strands of Anti Social Behaviour. The police are now providing information, (see new form appendix 2), if the person has served a custodial sentence within the previous 12 months, been convicted of any criminal offence in the same time period or has a pending criminal case. Any issues and customer challenges on information provided by the police will be passed onto the police to respond and resolve.
- To include pending convictions. In the past the police have only provided information on previous convictions. Following a review of the process we have included pending criminal convictions on the information we request from the police
- To include different types of local letting policies. In order to review the local letting policies they have all been brought together in one document which will be used by officers as a working guide to local letting policies.
- Previously local letting policies did not include current tenancy breaches. During consultation it was clear that opinion was to not allow current council tenants to move if there were breaches with their tenancy agreement. We have therefore widened tenancy breaches to include served with an NSP or SPO in a current tenancy.

8. Finance

8.1 Any changes made to the Abris system will incur a charge, it is envisaged at this point that the changes proposed will incur little, if any spend.

8.2 Training will be provided on the local letting policy this will require time of a senior manager. This update will be added to a rolling training programme on policy changes. Briefings will also be sent to elected members and staff.

8.3 By applying local lettings policies to a limited part of the local authorities stock will create sustainable communities, which may lead to fewer voids. However there is a slight risk that void properties may take longer to let as some policies are quite restrictive. This will lead to a financial impact on rent loss through voids.

9. Risks and uncertainties

9.1 Any change to the local letting policy must ensure that the needs of vulnerable and hard to reach groups are addressed, and the Council's statutory obligations are met. The local letting policy must be delivered in a transparent way to ensure it is fair, and seen to be fair.

9.2 There is a risk of delay in allocating properties as properties advertised with an local letting policy may not receive applications from customers who do not have a history of Anti Social Behaviour therefore impacting on void costs and turn around times.

9.3 There is a risk that blockages in temporary accommodation will occur therefore impacting on the use of temporary and the performance measure.

10. Background papers

10.1 The proposed changes have been informed by consultation with leaseholders, tenants, applicants and internal and external agencies. Legal Services have also been consulted on the proposed changes.

10.2 In monitoring the local letting policy we have used the Housing Assessment Panel as a mechanism to consider any changes, where possible, to seek views of others to ensure any improvements are effective and are at the heart of customer's needs and aspirations.

10.3 The review of the local lettings policies, which has been led by Neighbourhood Management who have consulted with elected members, customers, legal services, partners and staff.

10.4 Background Papers and Policies include:

- Homelessness strategy
- Localism Act 2011
- Housing Act 1996
- Allocation Policy

11. Contact details

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