

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 NOVEMBER 2012

REPORT BY REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH,
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

CONSULTATION ON POSSIBLE REVISIONS TO EAST HERTS
HOUSING REGISTER POLICY

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- The Housing Act 1996 states that all Local Authorities exercising a housing function must publish an Allocations Policy showing how homes will be allocated to applicants and prescribes certain categories of people who are to be given reasonable preference.
- The Localism Act 2011 sets out a number of key proposals which are relevant to housing, including changes to allocations, tenure reform and changes to homelessness legislation.
- The purpose of this report is to summarise these changes and how they might be implemented and to propose that the Council begins a consultation exercise with stakeholder housing partners and residents of East Herts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY SCRUTINY: That:

(A)	Members comment on the report; and
(B)	indicate their preferred option, set out in more detail in Essential Reference Paper B, for inclusion within the draft East Herts Housing Register and Allocations Policy.

1.0 Background

1.1 The Housing Act 1996 states that all Local Authorities exercising housing function must publish an Allocations Policy showing how homes will be allocated to applicants and prescribes certain

categories of people who are to be eligible for an allocation and/or given reasonable preference.

- 1.2 The Localism Act 2011, which received Royal Assent in November 2011, sets out a number of key proposals which are relevant to housing, including changes to allocations, tenure reform and changes to homelessness legislation. The Localism Act proposes significant housing reform which the Government says is intended to make the system of allocating housing fairer and more effective and to make it easier for decisions to be taken locally.
- 1.3 Some sections of this Act have already come into force and others will do shortly. The Section on giving members of the Armed Forces additional preference for social housing is expected to come into force in December 2012.
- 1.4 The Government has also published in June 2012 an updated guidance document titled 'Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England'. Councils must have due regard to this document when drafting their Allocations Policy.
- 1.5 This report sets out the suggested policy issues and proposes a timetable for consulting on a new draft Allocations Policy for East Herts.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The implementation of the Localism Act and the new Government allocations guidance document requires the Council to review its Allocations Policy. Any major change to the Council's Housing Register Allocations Policy triggers a requirement to consult. Although formally there is only a requirement to consult with Registered Providers in the district the statutory Code of Guidance issued by the Government recommends that the consultation process should involve local communities.
- 2.2 The current Housing Register and Allocations Policy was agreed and implemented in June 2010 following some minor amendments to Local Connection eligibility and the Homeless Policy. Following conversations with our stakeholders it is generally felt that our current policy works well, is well understood by our residents, houses those in need and is transparent. The Council has received very few complaints or review requests from residents

who have been unhappy with the process. The introduction of Choice Based Lettings in 2010 has also been very popular with residents and stakeholders alike. The intention is therefore not to radically change how or who we allocate homes to but ensure we meet our statutory requirements and amend the policy to recognise best practice.

- 2.3 The process of consultation began with a presentation at the Council's Housing Forum, chaired by Councillor Haysey, to Registered Providers and other housing stakeholders in July 2012.
- 2.4 **At Essential Reference Paper "B"** is a document that was discussed at the Housing Forum and subsequently sent out to Registered Providers with homes in East Herts, other housing stakeholders such as the CAB and County, put into the Members Information Bulletin and also put onto the Council's website in August 2012. It summarises the policy changes that the local authority can implement and the possible implications, advantages and disadvantages. The document asked our stakeholders what factors they considered important in determining who should be able to register for housing and what criteria should be considered in assessing their priority once on the Housing Register.
- 2.5 Following this on from this initial consultation and also feedback from members at Community Scrutiny the Housing Service will draft a revised Housing Register and Allocations Policy. The draft will also take into account the statutory changes required from the Localism Act, the revised Allocations Guidance document from the Government and best practice.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 The draft document will be circulated to all Registered Providers, Members and other housing stakeholders and placed on the Council's website. Individual meetings will be held with the four main Registered Providers of South Anglia, Riversmead, Paradigm and Aldwyck Housing Associations.
- 3.2 The proposed timetable for developing, agreeing and implementing the Policy is as follows:
 - Initial discussions with Community Scrutiny November 2012
 - Drafting of Housing Allocations Policy December to January 2013

- Draft policy circulated to individual Registered Providers, other stakeholders and Councillors January 2013
- Draft policy put on Council's website for consultation with a deadline of four weeks for comment in January 2013
- Discussions with individual Registered Providers, January and February 2013
- Comments incorporated into Housing Register and Allocations Policy and presented to Executive March 2013.
- Policy Adopted and implemented from April 2013

Background Papers

Localism Act 2011

'Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England', Communities and Local Government.

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