

MINUTES OF MEETING URGENT DECISIONS HELD ON TUESDAY, 7TH APRIL, 2020, 11:00

PRESENT:

Councillor: Emine Ibrahim, Cabinet Member for Housing & Estate Renewal

ALSO ATTENDING: Interim Housing Strategy & Commissioning Manager

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declaration of interests.

28. THE TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

The Cabinet Member considered a report which, in light of government advice in relation to Covid-19, sought approval to temporarily suspend the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system for all housing allocations and replace it with direct lets to specific households until it was safe and practical to resume CBL.

The Cabinet Member sought assurances about the fact that applicants would be eligible to receive only one offer and, if refused without good reason, would face sanctions as set out in the Allocations Policy. The Cabinet Member requested that during any subsequent appeal process that occurred, the Council took into account the fact that allocation was made as a direct let and not part of the Choice Based Letting scheme and therefore the resident had not bid for the property in question. In response, the Interim Housing Strategy & Commissioning Manager advised that this request would be fed back to the Housing Demand service and agreed that in the instance of a housing allocation being rejected by a prospective tenant, the fact that this was done under a direct letting system would be noted and factored into the appeals process where possible.

RESOLVED

Having considered the report and appendices the Lead Member for Housing and Estate Renewal:

- I. Noted the contents of the Equalities Impact Assessment attached at Appendix B of the report.
- II. Agreed to suspend the Choice Based Lettings scheme for lettings of Council housing on secure or introductory terms for a temporary period.

- III. Delegated authority to the Director of Housing, Regeneration and Planning in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing and Estate Renewal to lift the suspension of the Choice Based Lettings scheme when in their view the Government advice on social distancing permits multiple viewings to take place, following which date the Policy will be applied with the temporary changes set out in this report removed.
- IV. Agreed that during the period of suspension all allocations of lettings of Council housing on secure or introductory term tenancies be by direct let as set out in the Housing Allocations Policy as varied as set out in paragraphs 6.3-6.4 below and paragraphs set out in Appendix A of the report.

Reasons for decision

Recommendations II & III are intended to protect the safety of applicants and staff while minimising the disruption to applicants, allow allocations of accommodation to continue in the current circumstances and release staff to address other Covid-19 work.

These proposals will also minimise the cost to the Council of delaying these moves due to potential rent loss when properties are vacant, as well as the cost of continuing to provide alternative accommodation.

Alternative options considered

To continue with Choice Based Lettings for all Council lets

This option was rejected because this represents a significant risk to both applicants and staff if continued in the same format. CBL is also a complex and time heavy process and ceasing to do this will relieve pressure on staff managing allocations and release staff to manage the Covid-19 crisis.

To suspend CBL for Housing Association (“PRP”) lets as well

This option was rejected at this time because of the requirement to consult with Private Registered Providers over changes to the Housing Allocations Policy and to give them sufficient time to respond. While a minimal period of consultation would be reasonable, where this has no effect on their nominations, a longer period would be required to suspend the use of CBL for nominations to PRPs.

To suspend all new lets

This option was rejected because this would prevent households from moving from accommodation that is unsuitable for their needs for example where households have specific medical requirements or are fleeing violence.

CHAIR:

Signed by Chair

Date