

Report Title: Proposed new Lettings Policy

Report of: Director of Social Services

Wards(s) affected: All

Report for: Key

1. Purpose

1.1 The report asks the Executive Committee to approve the proposed new Lettings Policy attached at Appendix A. It further asks the Executive Committee to take account of the public consultation and comments from the scrutiny review of the policy.

2. Introduction by Executive Member

2.1 The service has been working for almost a year now on a new allocations policy. The main objectives of this overhaul are:

- To incorporate new legislative requirements to reflect a number of new initiatives, like the new “Prevention & Options” approach, the fact that we are joining “Home Connections” (the sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme, which will be launched in November, etc).
- To review and update the housing register of new applicants and to enable the Council to give higher priority to overcrowding transfers and to strengthen local connections, in line with expressed councillors preferences.

The timetable for implementing the new policy is tight and to a large extent determined by the forthcoming launch of our Home Connections (in November) and the Best Value inspection (next April). The implementation work involved is significant (e.g. reviewing the housing register alone involves reviewing the cases and re-registering up to 24,000 applicants and recalculating points under the new mechanisms etc) and is already advanced (to meet the deadlines referred to above).

There has been extensive consultation (with tenants, Councillors, Residents Associations, RSLs, Voluntary Groups, partners, other stakeholders and the Scrutiny Panel looking into the whole issue), which has resulted in various adjustments and improvements from earlier drafts. Once the new system is in place, there will be regular reviews of the detailed elements (e.g. points weighting for various priority categories etc), enabling the council to continuously refine and adjust its priorities in the light of experience on the ground and changing circumstances.”

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the proposed Lettings Policy be agreed subject to the Executive Committee taking account of the public consultation and the comments of the Scrutiny review.
- 3.2 That agreement of the final points scheme be delegated to the Director of Social Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing.
- 3.3 That the pointing scheme be reviewed, and amended, as appropriate, by the Director of Social Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing as required to meet the Council's objectives.

Report Authorised by: Anne Bristow, Director of Social Services.

Contact Officer: Nigel Long, Policy and Procedures Manager

4. Director of Finance Comments

- 4.1 The Director of Finance has been consulted and has no further comments to add to those already included within the report.

5. Head of Legal Services Comments

- 5.1 The Head of Legal Services has been consulted in the preparation of this report.
- 5.2 There is a legal requirement under s167 of the Housing Act 1996 for each local authority to have an allocations scheme which sets out its priorities for allocating housing accommodation. The content of the Lettings Policy is within the discretion of the local authority but the Policy must comply with the framework set out in the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Code of Guidance for Local housing authorities for the Allocation of Accommodation.
- 5.3 The proposed new Letting Policy complies with the current legislation and the Government's Code of Guidance and must be approved by the Executive prior to implementation.

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Housing Strategy 2003-8 Allocation of Accommodation	Haringey Council	December 2005
-Code of Guidance Homelessness Prevention	DCLG	May 2002
-Best Practice Guidance Homelessness Code of Guidance	DCLG	June 2006 July 2006
Housing Act 1996 Homelessness Act 2002		

7. Strategic Implications

- 7.1 The Lettings Policy is a key tool for meeting housing need. It should be considered alongside new service initiatives such as the *'Prevention and Options'* service and will contribute to meeting the Government target of a 50% reduction in the use of temporary accommodation by 2010
- 7.2 It addresses the Council's wider care duties to older people, vulnerable adults and to children. The pointing scheme reflects the priority given to meeting their needs.
- 7.3 Housing supply shortage is being addressed through land use planning and the sub regional funding process.
- 7.4 The proposed policy allows the Council the opportunity to address housing need through the letting of council housing and through nominations to housing associations.
- 7.5 The Lettings Policy contains clear priorities for the allocation of housing. The priorities will allow the Council to address the areas of greatest need.
- 7.6 The policy places a strong emphasis upon the prevention of homelessness whilst meeting the statutory requirements to give priority to certain categories of people.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 Extensive consultation and publicity are a requirement of launching a new policy. These have involved presentations at conferences as well as a survey of 25,000 People on the Housing Register. The total costs of this exercise are expected to amount to £25,000. These costs will be met within the Management and Support budget for the Housing Service.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 Following close working with Legal Services the policy fully meets the legal requirements and duties placed upon the Council with respect to the allocation of Council housing.

10. Equalities Implications

10.1 The Council's proposed Lettings Policy is an important tool that will help improve the housing position of BME and vulnerable residents in the Borough.

10.2 Given the large proportion of homeless BME and Housing Register applicants the policy, with its clear priorities, will meet the needs of such groups more effectively than in the past.

10.3 The proposed policy makes addressing the needs of vulnerable people a high priority. This is balanced with the need to respond to the problems of severe overcrowding locally.

10.4 The proposed policy places a strong emphasis upon meeting the needs of older and disabled households.

10.5 The policy has been the subject of an Equalities Impact Assessment.

11. Consultation

11.1 The draft Lettings Policy has been the subject of extensive consultation. The consultation has included an exhibition at a residents conference, a presentation to the Residents Consultative Forum, presentations to a HAVCO Housing and Social Services conference, focus groups with BME and hard to reach groups.

11.2 An update on the results of the consultation will be tabled at the Executive meeting on the 12 September.

11.3 There has also been a Housing Scrutiny Review of the Lettings Policy. The findings of the review will be reported to the Executive Committee on the 12th September by the Cllr Bevan, the chair of the review.

12. Background

12.1 The proposed new Lettings Policy is required to ensure that the Council is meeting the changes required by new legislation and arising from caselaw. The new policy reflects the Government's emphases upon choice and the need to have clear priorities, each with appropriate weighting in the point's scheme. The proposed new policy reflects Best Practice.

12.2 The policy before you, in reality consists of two documents, the policy itself which Sets out the priorities of the Council and the second document is the points scheme. The two have been combined to improve transparency and understanding of the approach.

Housing need in Haringey.

12.3 Haringey contains some of the most deprived wards in the Country. Almost 30% of Haringey's population live in areas that are amongst the 10% most deprived in the United Kingdom.

12.4 The borough has relatively high levels of unemployment and a high level of inequality in health reflected in high levels of vulnerability such as mental health. 11.5% of households have incomes below £10,000 leading to significant numbers of residents relying upon social housing.

12.5 It is this level of deprivation, when coupled to the ethnic and culturally diverse nature of the borough, and the implications of this for family income and household size that provides the background to this Lettings Policy.

12.6 The main challenge for the policy is how to address high levels of severe housing need in a fair and transparent way with homes being allocated to people with the greatest need. According to the Housing Needs Survey Update 2005 there is a shortfall of 4387 affordable homes. In 2004/5 the level of homeless applications was running at 145% of the total social housing lettings and of the applicants 90% were from Black and Minority Ethnic households. All the evidence points to a borough and a housing service under severe pressure.

12.7 There were 4,843 homelessness decisions made between January 2004 and December 2005 including approvals and acceptances.

12.8 There were 5822 households in temporary accommodation at the 17 August 2006.

12.9 The 2006 Housing Need Survey has provided a wealth of information about the severity of housing problems in the Borough:

- 19,376 households were defined as living in unsuitable housing. This is 20.9%
- of all households in the borough.
- 35.6% of Council housing is unsuitable
- 30.7% of housing association property is unsuitable

12.10 Some 19.5% of households contain people who require support. The biggest groups are:

- | | |
|-----------------------|------|
| • Physical Disability | 12% |
| • Frail Older People | 4.7% |
| • Mental Health | 4.0% |
| • Sensory disability | 1.7% |
| • Learning disability | 1.6% |
| • Other | 3.0% |

BME Households

- 12.11 Nearly 30% of residents come from BME communities. Of these 19% are headed by A Black person, 5.3% by an Asian person, 2.8% by a person of mixed race and 2.5% by another ethnic minority group.
- 12.12 However, in 2004-2005, 90% of homeless applicants were from BME applicants highlighting the severe housing problems facing the poorest areas of the borough and BME households concentrated in such areas.

Overcrowding

- 12.13 Addressing overcrowding locally is a top priority. According to the 2001 Census there are 20,455 households in Haringey who are suffering from overcrowding which equates to 22% of all households in the borough. More than 10% of households living in social housing are overcrowded with 4.4% severely overcrowded. Many living in the private sector also suffer with nearly 8% overcrowded

The Points Scheme

- 12.14 The points scheme set out alongside the policy in the one document is 'illustrative' and may need some further amendment to ensure it meets the Council's priorities.
- 12.15 This report proposes that the Executive Committees delegates to the Director of Social Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing authority to agree the final points scheme.
- 12.16 It is desirable to review pointing levels on an appropriate basis in order to ensure Council priorities are met and that the policy is implemented in a flexible way. The report therefore seeks Executive Committee approval to delegate the reviewing and amendment of the point's scheme to the Director of Social Services in consultation with the Executive Committee Member for Housing.

13. Conclusion

- 13.1 This report asks the Executive Committee to approve a new Lettings Policy to guide the work of the Council in the allocation of Council and social housing in the Borough.
- 13.2 This report concludes that the proposed policy meets the legal duties placed upon The Council. It sets out clear priorities and these meet both the statutory requirements and Best Practice.
- 13.3 The report also asks the Executive to consider the results of the consultation and to consider the recommendations of the Scrutiny review.

14. Use of Appendices

- 14.1 Attached at appendix A is the proposed Lettings Policy.