

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities) Introduced by Executive Member (Homes and Housing)	Executive Cabinet	Thursday, 19 January 2023

Select Move Policy Review 2022

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Yes
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Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards
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Purpose of the Report

1. The Select Move Steering Group has reviewed its allocations policy and this report seeks permission to consult on the new draft policy.

Recommendations to Executive Cabinet

2. That the Executive Cabinet approves the policy enabling the Select Move partnership to consult on the policy.
3. Any changes following the consultation are delegated for approval to the Executive Member for Homes and Housing.

Reasons for recommendations

4. To fulfil the Council's Part VI statutory duties and review the Housing Allocation policy by maximising the allocation of properties to households who are in the most need and to those that can demonstrate a local connection to the borough.

Executive summary

5. As part of the Select Move policy review, changes are proposed to improve how Social housing across the partnership is delivered. All proposed changes will be subject to consultation and can be viewed in detail in Appendix 1 and 2.
6. The amended policy proposes:
 - Strengthening the local connection rules.

- Simplifying the banding system from 5 bands to 4 including the removal of global banding.
- Reviewing the shortlisting procedure on how many properties an applicant can refuse before being suspended or closed.
- Adding new categories to band B and C on early intervention for people living in unsecure and unaffordable housing.
- Expanding the qualifying criteria for customers qualifying for the statutory housing need bands A, B and C.

Corporate priorities

7. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas	Healthy, safe, and engaged communities

Background to the report

8. By law, all Local Authorities must adopt a Housing Allocations Policy under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, which must be published and kept under review. The Select Move policy requires a review to make the policy fairer and clearer, and to ensure it still reflects the partnership's priorities.
9. The draft policy aims to strengthen the local connection to the Borough. It has been identified that the current policy is less effective than neighbouring local authorities when it comes to Local connection. In the current policy you can gain a Local connection after 6 months of residing in the Borough. Increasing the local connection to 2 years will require people to demonstrate they have an established connection to the Borough and have invested in our communities.
10. It has been necessary to review how properties are allocated and how shortlisting is prioritised to ensure the process is easier to understand and priority is given to those who need it most.
11. There are new proposals set out in the draft policy that recognise the current cost-of-living crisis and addresses households that live in unsecure accommodation. These categories will provide a early intervention approach and prevent households from hitting crisis point and becoming homeless due to their current property being unaffordable.
12. The draft policy recognises the need for sustainable communities and proposes to help address this by awarding a quota of properties to employment priority and therefore meeting housing need and employment together. The percentage will go out for consultation as either 10, 15 or 20%.
13. On the 10th November 2022 Executive Cabinet accepted all the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Move Task group. This Cabinet report is not the Cabinet

response to those recommendations, but the Select Move Partnership has taken into account the recommendations of the Task group when proposing amendments to the policy. Cllr June Molyneaux as the Chair of the Task group, as well as all the members involved are thanked for their thorough review.

Proposed Policy Changes

14. **Proposed change 1:** It is proposed to strengthen the local connection rules to qualify to join the Housing Register. Increasing the threshold of local connection for an applicant to be able to join the Housing Register will prioritise established local families who have a strong connection for residence, family, or employment over applicants who cannot demonstrate such a strong connection.

Current Policy	New Policy
Have lived in a Select move Council area for 6 months out of the last 12 months or 3 years out of the last 5 years continuously.	Lived in a Select Move area continuously for the last 2 years.
Have close family (normally considered to be a mother, father, brother, sister, or adult son or daughter) that have lived in the district for a minimum of the last 5 years.	Have close family (normally considered to be a mother, father, brother, sister, or adult son or daughter) that have lived in an area for a minimum of the last 5 years and, under the new policy, if they do not have a local connection for residence or employment they will now need to demonstrate a need to move to a Select Move partner's area to give or receive essential support from close family.
Are employed in permanent employment in Select Move Council's area.	Are employed in permanent employment in a Select Move Council's area and that to travel to work by public transport would take them in excess of one hour each way.

Exceptions under homelessness to fulfill statutory duties will be applied and safeguards for applicants who apply to join the Register who have fled domestic abuse or extreme threats of violence from another area.

15. **Proposed Change 2:** Select Move is a choice based letting scheme that allows the applicant the element of choice on what properties they express their interest in. In the current policy applicants can refuse three offers before an application is closed. The policy is proposing to reduce this to two reasonable offers. This is to enable Housing Associations to allocate properties faster and avoid a considerable loss of rent. The definition of a reasonable offer is set out in the proposed new policy. An example of this would be a refusal of a property that does not meet an applicant's needs for disability adaptations, this would be classed as reasonable reason to refuse a property. Applicants will be advised to bid on properties they are going to accept to avoid any penalties being imposed.

Current Policy	New Policy Options for Consultation
Under the current policy an applicant can refuse 3 reasonable offers before they are	If an applicant refuses 2 reasonable offers, they would be removed from the housing

removed from the Housing Register for 6 months.	register and not allowed to reapply for a period of 12 months, or have their banding reduced to Band D for 12 months.
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16. **Proposed Change 3:** Reducing the number of Bands from 5 to 4 A-D, to simplify the process for applicants than the current 5 bands A-E.

Current Policy	New Policy
Band A urgent housing need cases that need to move immediately.	Band A urgent housing need cases that need to move immediately.
Band B will be for urgent housing need cases that need to move.	Band B will be for urgent housing need cases that need to move.
Band C will be everyone else that the legislation states has a statutory housing need.	Band C will be everyone else that the legislation states has a statutory housing need.
Band D – applicants assessed as not being owed a reasonable preference but meet the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive community criteria (Voluntary work or employment in the SM area) • Under occupancy by one bed • Over occupancy by one bed 	Band D will be for everyone else who does not have a housing need
Band E – No housing need	Removed from new policy

17. **Proposed Change 4:** Setting aside a percentage of vacant properties for applicants who are in employment. It is proposed a percentage of properties are reserved for working households only.

Current Policy	New Policy
Under the current policy properties for employment are often allocated to Band D this captures applicants who are employed in the SM area with no housing need, 10% of properties are allocated to this band per annum.	The proposal is to consult on the percentage of properties to be allocated to employment only 10, 15 or 20%. By awarding a quota of properties to employment will capture employment and housing need together, however the majority of homes would not be restricted to working households.

18. **Proposed Change 5:** Removal of Global banding and to place the requirement to have a local connection to the council where a property is advertised to the top of the shortlisting criteria. There will be safeguards for applicants who have to move from one Select Move Council area to another due to the risk of domestic abuse or other extreme threats which mean they would not be safe remaining in their 'home' area where they have a local connection. See appendix 2 for full details of the proposals.

19. **Proposed Change 6:** To add a new “Insecurity that risks homelessness” category to Band B. This category is not included in the current policy resulting in some families becoming homeless as their insecure living at home arrangement is not recognised as a housing need under the banding scheme.
20. **Proposed Change 7:** The proposed policy expands the criteria for customers who will qualify for the statutory housing need bands A, B and C. The policy additionally sets out clearer details for when a band will be awarded for each of the housing need criteria in each Band. This will mean assessments are always consistently applied. An additional category has been awarded to band C to capture applicants who are struggling financially and have been awarded a discretionary housing payment via Housing benefit to help pay rent. This would help prevent applicants from being evicted or incurring rent arrears. Helping people to move into more secure and affordable homes before hitting crisis point and becoming homeless. See appendix 2 detailing the band criteria for each band.

Consultation

21. Following approval being given to consult on the draft policy, a consultation programme will be undertaken, this will include a survey provided to all registered applicants via the Select move website on the key proposed changes, a link will be provided to enable all customers to view the draft policy. The link for the survey and draft policy will also be circulated to all key stakeholders. Information regarding the consultation will be provided on the select move website, all partner websites and the council's own website. The consultation will be for the period of 10 to 12 weeks and any request for changes following the consultation to be delegated for approval to the Executive Member for Homes and Housing.

Climate change and air quality

22. The work noted in the report does not impact on the Council's Carbon emissions and the wider Climate Emergency and sustainability targets of the Council.

Equality and diversity

23. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken and identifies that a full consultation is necessary which includes appropriate groups.

Risk

24. A risk register is available for the Select Move Partnership and is available on the Council's risk management system.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

25. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

26. Every district council needs to have a Housing Allocations Policy in place. This policy must be kept under regular review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. In this instant the proposal is to go out for a period of extensive consultation on the latest amended version of the shared Select Move policy. If any changes to the policy are necessary as

a consequence of the consultation, then the relevant Executive member will be granted delegated powers to approve them.

27. There are no concerns from a Monitoring Officer perspective with what is proposed in this report.

Background documents

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Policy

Appendix 2 – Consultation Paper

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