

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING COMMITTEE – 3 SEPTEMBER 2003**

#### **HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

##### **Report by Director of Homes & Technical Services**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to members the revised Housing Allocations Policy incorporating the changes arising from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, and to advise members of service improvement developments.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Housing Committee, held on 6 November 2002, members considered a report highlighting the implications arising from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 for the Council's Housing Allocations Policy. Members approved a number of recommended policy amendments and a series of service improvements.

#### **3. ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

- 3.1 The Allocations Policy (Appendix 1) has now incorporated all the changes as reported in November. The policy has been scrutinised by Legal Services and meets the obligations of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The policy has also been examined to ensure conformity with the Human Rights Act 1998. The revised version has been circulated for consultation to other housing providers in the area and tenants and residents associations.

#### **4. SERVICE IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES**

##### **4.1 Tenancy Support**

The Tenancy Support Teams are now in place and links with our colleagues in Social Services are now established to tailor the support required to the individual's needs. At the end of the first quarter of this year support was in place for 365 tenants, comprising 215 within the Kilmarnock area and 150 within the Cumnock area.

#### 4.2. New Tenant Information Packs

These packs, which provide comprehensive information on the full range of housing services along with contact information on other council services were introduced in April 2003 and are now issued as part of the sign-up process to all new tenants.

#### 4.3 New Tenant Starter Packs

In June 2003, New Tenant Starter Packs were introduced. The pack contains a variety of cleaning equipment and materials and are left in the house for the arrival of the new tenant. The packs are provided with income received from the Council's preferred energy supplier and are proving to be very popular.

#### 4.4 Lettable Standards

It was previously reported to Committee that it was proposed to introduce Lettable Standards to two areas on a pilot basis in order to assess the financial implications and effects on void turnaround time. Analysis has indicated the neither are significantly adversely affected and it is therefore proposed to roll out Lettable Standards across all the areas in August 2003.

#### 4.5 Valeting of Vacant Houses

All houses are now being valeted with a view to ensure that houses should always be viewed in a fit and clean condition. There are still some quality control issues in this regard which require further discussion with the contractors to confirm expectation levels and agreed standards.

#### 4.6 Offer Acceptance Procedures

In response to customer and member feedback we have reviewed the forms of correspondence used by the Department to communicate with new tenants and have issued revised paperwork which clarifies and distinguishes the pre-acceptance and confirmed acceptance of offers.

### 5. **SERVICE DEVELOPMENT**

#### 5.1 Common Housing Register (CHR)

It was reported to Committee at the meeting of 29 January 2003 that East Ayrshire Council, in conjunction with partner Registered Social Landlords (RSL'S), was one of 3 organisations to receive funding from the Scottish Executive to produce a prototype of a CHR. The prototype was developed in conjunction with Orchard Information Systems and presented to representatives from the Scottish Executive in April. The final assessment of the prototype is still awaited from the Scottish Executive. Full production costs for an East Ayrshire Common Housing Register have been identified and further discussions with regard to funding will be required with the Scottish Executive and partner RSL's.

## 5.2 Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

Choice Based Lettings is an alternative method of allocating houses which has been developed in a number of authorities down south and has recently been attracting considerable interest in Scotland.

Essentially, CBL Schemes require the landlord to advertise all available properties and require 'homeseekers' to register their interest for particular vacancies. Within the system, the landlord can identify specific target groups for individual vacancies e.g. 'Starters' for people seeking their first tenancy or 'Movers' for those seeking to transfer to more suitable accommodation.

The Scheme still allows for priority to be accorded to applicants depending on their specific housing requirements, but also affords the landlord scope to take account of factors like social networks and demographic profiles in identifying target groups in order to maintain a social mix which will encourage sustainable balanced communities. Where family connection points can promote young applicants to priority positions, it is important that the allocation system is flexible enough to ensure that there is an even spread of allocations to as broad a social and demographic mix as possible. CBL Schemes should, to some extent, allow the market to confirm the real level of demand. Shire Housing Association has expressed an interest in developing a pilot CBL Scheme in the wider Cumnock area, tying this into the development of the Common Housing Register mentioned above. It is proposed, therefore, that the possibility of running a pilot scheme in the Cumnock area in partnership with Shire HA should be fully explored.

## **6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The introduction of a pilot Choice Based Letting Scheme would be regarded as a local letting initiative which is available within the scope of the Allocation Policy.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Introducing a Choice Based Letting Scheme may incur additional financial implications in terms of marketing costs. At present it is envisaged that these will be contained within the current resource allocation.
- 7.2 There will be cost implications of implementing a full common housing register, however, the extent of this will be required to be quantified after discussions with the Scottish Executive and other Registered Social Landlords regarding available funding. It is anticipated the costs will be shared by all participating landlords on a pro-rata basis.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The relevant legislative requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 have been incorporated into the Housing Allocation Policy.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 It is recommended that members: -

- (i) Recommend to Council approval of the Allocations Policy contained in (Appendix 1);
- (ii) Note progress with regard to service improvement initiatives, and approve the introduction of lettable standards to all housing areas;
- (iii) Note the development of the Common Housing Register;
- (iv) Approve the proposed introduction of a pilot CBL Scheme in the south of the district.

**James Lavery,  
Director of Homes & Technical Services  
18<sup>th</sup> August 2003**

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Nil

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