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Please note that the following report was published separately from the main agenda for this meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee to be held on Monday, 25th November 2024 at 3.30 pm in Committee Rooms 1-2, City Hall.

7. Downsizing Policy Update (Pages 3 - 8)

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SUBJECT:	DOWNSIZING POLICY UPDATE
DIRECTORATE:	HOUSING AND INVESTMENT
REPORT AUTHOR:	MARIANNE UPTON, TENANCY SERVICES MANAGER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the Downsizing Policy, including outcomes (see Appendix 1).

2. Lincoln Tenants Panel Consultation

- 2.1 Lincoln Tenant's Panel (LTP) requested a review into this process and have been involved in this area of work. The Panel agreed to carry out a mini scrutiny exercise on the current policy and the outcomes, do a benchmarking exercise against schemes that other housing providers operate and be involved fully in reviewing the scheme to make recommendations about the future of the scheme and improvements.
- 2.2 LTP had an initial meeting on 22 August 2024 to discuss the outcomes for tenants so far, their views on the current policy and raise some further questions about the scheme that will inform their decision-making.
- 2.3 The next steps for the Panel will be to have further meetings with Officers involved in the process and co-produce an updated policy if it is recommended to continue.

3. Background

- 3.1 The original policy was written and agreed in 2023 with a view to helping tenants receiving Discretionary Housing Payments to meet the shortfall in their rent due to being impacted by the spare room subsidy.
- 3.2 The original budget for the 6-month pilot was £80,000 and it was anticipated that this could help up to 20 tenants to downsize to a more suitable property.
- 3.3 The 6-month pilot period ended in June 2024.

4. Outcomes

- 4.1 Appendix 1 shows an updated version of the spreadsheet outcomes for tenants accepted for the scheme (based on the one that was originally presented 9.9.24).
- 4.2 At the point where the pilot ended, there were still 7 applications from tenants that were waiting to be assessed.

- 4.3 There were 9 applications looked at as part of the scheme and 5 were approved. Two tenants have now moved and 1 has had approval rescinded following the discovery of very poor property condition and other tenancy issues.
- 4.4 Although two of the approved cases have still to either find a suitable property, or move to one they have been offered, the maximum amount that will be spent from the £80,000 budget, which will be £18,500.
- 4.5 Of the cases approved, approx. £6,500 will be used to clear arrears and other housing related debts.
- 4.6 The amount of £61,500 remaining from the original budget allocation will support more tenants (beyond those originally identified as in receipt of DHP payments) to move to a more suitable, manageable and affordable home, release more large properties to relieve homelessness and clear significant arrears and other housing debts.

5. Strategic Priorities

5.1 Let's reduce all kinds of inequality

The Downsizing Scheme reduces the debt for tenants who have been affected by the Spare Room Subsidy ("bedroom tax") and helps them to move to a more suitable, affordable property.

It also frees up larger homes for families on the housing register or who are homeless, providing them with stable, affordable accommodation.

5.2 Let's deliver quality housing

The scheme makes best use of the limited social housing stock and reduces homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation.

6. Organisational Impacts

6.1 Finance (including whole life costs where applicable)

There are no financial implications relating to the review of this policy. Should the scheme continue beyond the pilot and into future years there will be a requirement for inclusion of annual budgets within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

6.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules

There will be no legal implications to reviewing this policy as it is a discretionary scheme and works in accordance with the Allocations Policy and existing procedures for Managed Moves.

6.3 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

Each case is reviewed individually to assess the specific needs of the tenant(s), suitability of particular properties and to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the scheme.

Should a review recommend the scheme continue, an Equality Impact Assessment will be completed for any revised scheme proposals.

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

6.4 Human Resources

No impacts identified.

6.5 Land, Property and Accommodation

The improved use of accommodation has been described in Section 5.

6.6 Significant Community Impact &/or Environmental Impact

Please see the Council's [Environmental Policy \(sharepoint.com\)](#) for further guidance

Not applicable to this policy.

6.7 Corporate Health and Safety Implications

Not applicable to this policy.

7. Risk Implications

7.1 (i) Options Explored

This policy does not pose any additional risks.

7.2 (ii) Key Risks Associated with the Preferred Approach

N/A.

8. Recommendation

8.1 To note the outcomes of the five cases that were approved in the original pilot scheme.

8.2 Note that a review will be carried out in partnership with LTP.

8.2 Note that pending the full review of the Policy, the scheme will continue to operate beyond the pilot period using the remainder of the original budget allocation.

Is this a key decision?

No

Do the exempt information categories apply?

No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?

No

How many appendices does the report contain?

1

List of Background Papers:

Outcomes of Downsizing Cases during pilot 2024 v.3

Lead Officer:

Marianne Upton, Tenancy Services Manager
Email address: marianne.upton@lincoln.gov.uk

Area	no. of bedrooms	Property type	Other considerations	Incentive amount	Arrears	Other housing debt	Approved	If no, why	Amount paid to tenant	Update 31.10.24
Stamp End	3	Ground floor flat	Wet room	£3,800	Y	Rechargeable repairs	Y		approx. £200 - arrears cleared, some rechargeable repairs & buying new white goods	Has moved and received just over £200 which was the amount left after deductions for rent arrears, recharges & purchasing white goods
Boultham	3	House		£3,800	N	Rechargeable repairs	Y		Still awaiting suitable property but likely to be approx. £2000	Has moved. There were no arrears to clear. Recharges raised in excess of £2k so likely to receive approx. £1600
St Giles	3	House	Needs ground floor property	£3,800	Y	Council tax	Y		Still awaiting suitable property but likely to be approx. £1500	Has been made an offer & awaiting move in date. Likely to receive approx £1500 after clearing arrears
Ermine	2	Upper maisonette	Needs independent living scheme	£3,300	N	None	Y		Still awaiting suitable property but likely to be full amount	Application cancelled because failed property condition inspection. The extent of work to improve property condition exceeds the incentive amount & there are other tenancy issues to be considered
Birchwood	3	House	Needs ground floor property	£3,800	N	HB overpayment	Y		Still awaiting suitable property but likely to be approx. £2000	Still awaiting suitable property but likely to be approx. £2000 after clearing HB overpayment

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