

SUBJECT:	CHOICE BASED LETTINGS ALLOCATIONS POLICY – PROPOSED AMENDMENTS
DIRECTORATE:	DIRECTORATE OF HOUSING AND REGENERATION
REPORT AUTHOR:	BOB LEDGER, DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND REGENERATION

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for proposed amendments to the Choice Based Lettings Allocations policy.

2. Background and Executive Summary

- 2.1 Local housing authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 to have a scheme for the allocation of Council housing. Local housing authorities are also required to have regard to statutory guidance in exercising their functions under Part 5 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Localism Act 2011.
- 2.2 The last review of the Allocations Policy was considered by Executive in January 2015. A full review of the policy is proposed for the summer of 2018.
- 2.3 Earlier this year the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was enacted and provisions become operable from April 2018 which requires one change to be made to the allocations policy now. In addition it is proposed to make five other changes now to the policy on the basis that our Choice Based Lettings IT software is currently being upgraded and it makes sense to incorporate these changes within the software and thereby save monies that would likely have to be expended in the summer 2018 review.
- 2.4 If the Executive adopts the allocations policy changes proposed in section 3 below a consultation period with current applicants, and potential applicants via the website, will be commenced. Having taken Counsel advice this consultation period should last 8 weeks.
- 2.5 The existing Choice Based Letting Policy is appended to this report for information.

3. Proposed Changes to the CBL Allocations Policy

3.1 Change to Partnership Membership

- 3.1.1 Lincs Homefinder was launched in 2013 as a partnership between City of Lincoln Council, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey District

Council. From April 2018, West Lindsey DC have decided to withdraw from the partnership. This means that any applicant wishing to live in, or who are currently living in West Lindsey will need to apply to them directly.

3.2 Minimum Age to Apply for Accommodation

3.2.1 There is some ambiguity in the current policy about the age in which applicants are allowed to apply. It is proposed to clarify that applicants must be aged 18 or over to apply for accommodation. This change has been introduced because legislation does not permit a person under the age of 18 to hold a tenancy in law.

3.2.2 If the Authority has a statutory duty to accommodate or assist a person aged 16/17 with accommodation then a tenancy may be granted subject to appropriate support and a suitable guarantor.

3.3 Direct Lets to Statutory Homeless Households

3.3.1 Statutory homeless households are currently placed in our highest priority banding, Band 1. They are placed in that band because their circumstances mean that they need to be housed quickly. At present, statutory homeless households can bid on properties advertised. Unfortunately some applicants do not place any bids on suitable properties and this means that it takes longer for the Council to offer a suitable property to homeless households.

3.3.2 It is proposed that the Council will no longer allow statutory homeless households to bid for accommodation. Instead, the Council will make a direct match of suitable accommodation for them. This will enable the Council to offer suitable accommodation more quickly, moving vulnerable people and families out of temporary accommodation in to settled accommodation.

3.4 Homeless Relief Duty

3.4.1 Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 an additional duty is now owed to those who are assessed as likely to become homeless within 56 days. It is proposed that such assessed applications are placed in Band 2 of the allocations criteria

3.5 Introduction of a Transfer Quota

3.5.1 The Localism Act 2011 stated that in order to create stable and balanced communities, it was important that good tenants have the opportunity to transfer to more suitable accommodation. We have not previously reflected that in our policy but it is now proposed to introduce a 25% quota for transfer applicants i.e. existing tenants with clear rent accounts and no recent history of anti-social behaviour will be prioritised over non Council tenants.

3.5.2 We therefore propose to introduce a quota for transfer applicants which means that 25% of general housing will be advertised with a preference to City of Lincoln tenants requiring a transfer to more suitable accommodation

3.6 Refusals and Non-Bidding

- 3.6.1 The current Policy allows applicants to refuse three properties that they have bid for before we consider reducing their banding. This sometimes results in properties taking longer to let than they should leading to an increase in the loss of rental income and properties standing empty. It is therefore proposed that, following two unreasonable refusals, an application will be moved to band 4 for a period of 6 months. At the end of the 6 month period their application will be reconsidered.
- 3.6.2 With respect to non-bidding, the current Policy does not address the issue of applicants not bidding for properties. This means that the Council is administering a large list of applicants many of whom do not intend to bid for any properties. The Council therefore will reserve the right to remove an applicant from the waiting list if no bids are placed during a 12 month period when suitable properties have been advertised.

4. **Strategic Priorities**

4.1 Let's Reduce Inequality

The proposed amendments to the Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy clarifies the priority given to those assessed as homeless and gives additional priority to those effectively managing existing Council tenancies.

5. **Organisational Impacts**

5.1 Finance.

No implications.

5.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules

The proposed allocations policy amendments reflect changed priorities brought about by the Homelessness reduction act 2017.

5.3 Human Resources

No implications.

5.4 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights

An Equality Impact Assessment has been produced. There is no evidence to show that the amended policy will have a detrimental impact on any group.

6. **Risk Implications**

6.1 None identified.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 It is recommended that Executive endorses the proposed changes to the Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy as detailed in section 3 of the report.

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? One

List of Background Papers: None

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