

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>DOWNSIZING POLICY AND REVIEW</b>
<b>DIRECTORATE:</b>	<b>HOUSING AND INVESTMENT</b>
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	<b>MARIANNE UPTON, TENANCY SERVICES MANAGER</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update HSSC on the initial 6-month pilot of the Downsizing Policy (see Appendix 1 for current policy), including outcomes.

## **2. Lincoln Tenants Panel Consultation (LTP)**

- 2.1 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 Panel have asked for further information on the numbers of tenants still under-occupying, with a breakdown by property size, property type, location and age of the tenant(s).
- 2.4 The next steps for the Panel will be to make proposals for any improvements to the policy, alongside proposals from 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 There was a slight delay in getting the expression of interest form on the website and promoting the scheme to tenants, which had an impact on when the first cases were put forward and may have limited the number of tenants considered.

- 4.2 Once the scheme was being actively promoted by Housing Officers, there was a steady flow of requests coming in. And 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. The anonymised details of all cases considered, and their outcomes are shown in the table in Appendix 2.
- 4.4 Although several 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 will be £18,500.
- 4.5 Of the cases approved, approx. £6,500 will be used to clear arrears and other housing related 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**

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**

### **8. Recommendation**

8.1 To note the outcomes of the pilot period.

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

**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?** 2

**List of Background Papers:** None

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