

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	27 November 2017
Report of	-	Councillor Clark
Subject	-	Rother Housing Associations, Letting of Homes Policy, Refusal of Accommodation Policy

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

1. Applicants have been evicted from housing within the last two years. Applicants have arrears with Housing Associations (e.g. Orbit Housing) or another landlord where they cannot demonstrate a commitment to reduce arrears (normally regular payments over a minimum period of six months). There appears not to be any appeals process in place to challenge refusal decisions.
2. Rent arrears and debt are more likely to happen to low income families. Recent changes in housing benefit regulations are not helping the situation. Social housing is expected to provide housing for people who have the highest priority need. It is not based on a policy of people in a high income bracket who will find the rent easy to pay.
3. Rother Housing officers are under incredible pressure to try to find housing for applicants who are on the Council's housing waiting list. With the high cost of private renting and £30,000 deposit needed to buy a house, the only chance low income families have to find a decent home is to be housed by Housing Associations.
4. Housing Associations appear to be acting like private landlords, being selective in choosing which families they are prepared to let to, rather than those in high priority housing need. Housing Associations were created to provide homes for residents on low incomes.
5. I am concerned that Housing Associations who provide housing in Rother have introduced a new policy regarding housing nominations received from the Council. A number of families nominated by the Council have been refused a housing let because they have had rent arrears in the past. People get into rent arrears for a number of reasons e.g. relationship break-ups, unemployment, low wages, ill health and even more so if in a high private rental. Apart from this being an unfair policy, it could cause serious problems for Rother's homeless applicants.
6. The Council often has to put homeless applicants into temporary accommodation at a real cost, this can be as much as £1,000 per month. This is always seen as a short term solution.
7. If Housing Associations are refusing to house any applicants who have a history of rent arrears, the Council will not be able to house the homeless and cannot be placed in the private sector as rents are too high. What happened

to the policy of all agencies working together to meet the Council's housing needs?

8. If this Policy is to become standard practice when assessing applicants, the Council's costs will increase because people have to be housed in temporary accommodation for much longer periods. Some families are now spending several weeks in temporary accommodation while the Council searches for a solution to their housing needs.

Conclusion

9. I would like to draw Members attention to this issue.

Councillor Charles Clark
Rother District Councillor – Bexhill, St Michaels Ward