

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	1 July 2019
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Housing Allocations Policy

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 June 2019, considered a report on the Council's Housing Allocations Policy. The recommendation and minute arising is reproduced below.

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the draft Consultation Plan and draft Housing Allocations Policy for consultation with residents and wider stakeholders be approved.

OSC19/08. **HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

Members received the report of the Executive Director on the Housing Allocations Policy, which was to provide a framework for the equitable, effective and accountable allocation of social housing. Social housing was in very limited supply and accounted for only 10% of the total housing stock in Rother; this percentage was below the national average of 17%. Therefore, only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area were likely to obtain social housing.

There was also a growing demand for social housing locally. The main factor contributing to this rise in demand was the inability of many households on low incomes to be able to afford other forms of housing. At the time, there were 1,600 households on the Housing Register with only 192 allocations having been awarded in 2018/19.

The draft Housing Allocations Policy at Appendix 1 to the report had been developed following an officer-led review, which was to ensure that the draft Housing Allocations Policy continued to meet its stated objectives effectively.

A factor in the Council's ability to make changes to the Housing Allocations Policy was that it had a duty to provide 'reasonable preference' to certain categories of household when considering both their eligibility for the register and their priority for housing, as these were ensured under statute. Examples included the requirement to afford local connection to households fleeing domestic violence from another area and the need to provide a level of priority to households that were homeless. There were a number of other types of urgent housing needs to be considered, and it was also important to recognise the role of the Housing Allocations Policy in supporting the redistribution of family-sized social housing from older households without children within their household to younger households with children.

Members were provided with a detailed description of the main changes being proposed within the consultation at Appendix 3 to the report. The main change proposed was to revise the banding structure; the present Housing Allocations Policy consisted of four bands and the proposal was to move to a new two-band system. Households in the most urgent housing need would all be given equal priority and be placed in an 'urgent priority' band. All other households, assessed as eligible for the register, would be placed in a second, lower priority band known as the 'waiting list'. The proposal was that households within the second band would be awarded points, which would be allocated according to their level of housing need.

A second significant proposed change was a revision of the order in which households were nominated for social housing. This process was important as the need to nominate households according to their level of housing need did not support the Council to meet its objective to promote socially, economically and demographically balanced communities.

It was proposed that when awarding social housing, the Council would firstly prioritise households on the Housing Register with the highest level of housing need; from the remaining list of households (who would have the same level of priority) an assessment of local connection would be made to reduce the list of potential nominees further; finally, the assessor would consider how long any remaining households had been on the Housing Register and nominate the remaining households accordingly.

The draft consultation plan attached at Appendix 2 to the report, set out the groups that would be consulted and the methods of engagement. The majority of the consultation would take place via an online questionnaire, however, telephone and written consultation responses would be accepted and would take place between 8 July and 30 August 2019. The policy was then to be reviewed and brought back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee towards the end of the year.

Members had the opportunity to raise questions and the following points were noted:

- Members agreed that it was important to consider local connections when assessing level of need, so that applicants remained close to family and friends;
- the consultation document would be completed by a small test group prior to wider circulation, to ensure appropriate tone of voice used;
- the consultation would be open to all via My Alerts and the website, in addition to the most relevant groups being targeted;
- the scheme would be reviewed annually to ensure it remained fit for purpose;
- paper copies and assistance with completing the questionnaire would be available at the help points; and
- the Probation Service had not been included in the list of organisations to consult with, due to the complex issues it dealt with.

(Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda Item 7).

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director