

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

22 March 2016

OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHOICE BASED LETTINGS
INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER)

Contact Officer: Amber Russell Tel No: 01962 848229

RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned an Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) to review the Hampshire Home Choice Choice Based Lettings system and the existing policy in relation to Community Lettings.

The ISG considered the objectives of the Hampshire Home Choice partnership and the recent performance in relation to meeting housing need across all partner authorities. It concluded that the objectives and the scheme of allocations remain "fit for purpose".

The ISG also reviewed the existing policy in relation to Community Lettings Plans. It did conclude some amendments were required to ensure consistent application and also to ensure any such plans to do not significantly disadvantage all applicants in housing need and with a local connection to the Winchester district.

Due to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 21 March 2016 being cancelled, the Chairman of that Committee and the Chairman of the ISG have agreed to the matter being referred straight to Cabinet (Housing) Committee to avoid delay.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the outcome of the ISG review and its conclusion that the existing sub regional scheme of allocations and local City Council variations remain “fit for purpose”, be noted.
2. That the existing policy relating to the application of Community Lettings Plans be amended as set out in paragraph 5.3 and 5.4 of the report.
3. That a Member Briefing on Hampshire Home Choice and the Allocations Framework be delivered in Summer/Autumn 2016.
4. That officers facilitate a continuous programme of awareness raising on the Allocations Framework and matters relating to Housing Allocations for applicants of Hampshire Home Choice and the wider general public.

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

22 March 2016

OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHOICE BASED LETTINGS INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER)

DETAIL:

1. Introduction
 - 1.1. This report provides details of the work of the Choice Based Lettings Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG), setting out the terms of reference, the issues considered by the group and its recommendations.
 - 1.2. The Committee is asked to note the work undertaken by the group and is requested to consider the recommendations put forward in relation to the use of Community Lettings Plans.
2. Terms Of Reference
 - 2.1. The ISG agreed the following terms of reference:
 - a. To review the impact of the Allocations Framework on the current Housing Register and on addressing Housing need in the Winchester District;
 - b. To consider whether additional local measures/variations to the Framework are required;
 - c. To review the original Hampshire Home Choice policy objectives in light of experience and to consider whether the current operation is meeting those objectives;
 - d. In particular, to review the Council's current policy in relation to Community Lettings Plans and to consider whether additional measures to increase priority for applicants with a "local connection" are required.
3. Background
 - 3.1. Hampshire Home Choice (HHC) was launched in April 2009 and originally managed by East Hampshire District Council, Havant Borough Council and Winchester City Council. Test Valley Borough Council joined the partnership in June 2011, and Eastleigh Borough Council recently joined in February 2014.

- 3.2. A new “sub regional” HHC scheme of allocation was approved at that time and reviewed and updated in March 2013 (CAB2472(HSG) refers).
- 3.3. Also, following a previous ISG review of the Allocations process, Report CAB2293 dated 8 February 2012 approved additional flexibilities to consider specific lettings plans for new developments in certain circumstances.
- 3.4. The 2013 amendments to the HHC Allocations Framework sought to align the policy with the welfare changes and benefit restrictions. It also introduced the limiting of lettings in villages of less than 3,000 to residents with a connection to that village.

4. Issues Considered by the Group

- 4.1. The ISG has met on three occasions to consider information in relation to:
 - a. Performance of the HHC system and comparisons with other districts;
 - b. The use of local lettings plans and community lettings plans and the impact of changes in relation to village lettings.

5. Local Lettings Plans

- 5.1. The Group discussed the issue of local lettings plans and noted officer reports regarding increasing demand for them. It was agreed that the impact of the village lettings policy had addressed many of the previous concerns of the impact of development on small communities.
- 5.2. The use of Community Lettings Plans for larger developments was also noted. The Group did support the proposal that any such plan should be designed with care, based on evidence and should seek to achieve a reasonable and fair representation for social housing residents in the District rather than for the community as a whole.
- 5.3. It was accepted that approving local lettings plans for all new developments could result in applicants in high housing need missing out on new housing. To avoid this, it was suggested that the use of such plans be limited to:
 - a. Exception sites;
 - b. New-build developments where no significant developments had occurred within 5 years;
 - c. New-build development on Council land where it is important for the stability of the community that local families are given some priority;

- d. Major development areas where it is critical for the stability and future success of the community that careful consideration is given to child distribution and socio-economic profile.
- 5.4. The Group agreed that apart from exception sites, restrictions for all other local lettings plans and community lettings plans should be limited to a maximum of 50% of properties within the development and should only apply for the first letting. All subsequent lets should be subject to the standard local connection to the Winchester District.
6. Objectives of Hampshire Home Choice
- 6.1. The Group considered and reviewed each of the key objectives of the HHC system:
- a. To provide a single point of access to applicants across the 5 authorities – *It was considered that this is being met well and that the approach provides a transparent and consistent approach to all applicants.*
 - b. To increase applicant choice – *Emphasis is placed on choice, although it would have to be accepted that with such competing demand and limitations on what applicants can bid for, choice is limited. The move away from “cross border” lettings has also reduced choice, but has been supported by all partners.*
 - c. To assist social and economic mobility and access to employment – *The scheme does aid mobility through allowing connections in relation to employment and family relationships.*
 - d. To reduce costs through economies of scale – *The sharing of system costs, framework reviews and consistency of process has undoubtedly resulted in reduced costs.*
 - e. To reduce voids/rent loss on harder to let properties – *The Council’s performance in relation to voids and relets is significantly better than it was pre 2009. It now falls within the top 25% of all social landlords.*
 - f. To assist where possible partner authorities to meet homeless duties – *Protocols for addressing homelessness are applied consistently across the sub region and the scheme supports the meeting of homelessness duties by giving additional priority for anyone in temporary accommodation for more than 9 months.*
 - g. To be sufficiently flexible to reflect and address local issues – *All partners have their own specific allocations policy and the sub-regional approach does not limit that.*
 - h. To provide consistency and transparency to applicants, RPs and partner authorities – *All agreed that the scheme provides consistency and transparency. Achieving this when all cases can*

be so different is challenging and is only achieved by the scheme giving priority for the time spent on the waiting list.

- i. To encourage further joint working between the authorities, where appropriate – *All partners work well and meet quarterly through the HHC Board.*
- j. To maintain a balance of cross-boundary moves ensuring local people are not disadvantaged (excluding Eastleigh Borough Council) – *To ensure local people in some districts were not disadvantaged, it has been necessary to amend the policy with regard to cross-border moves, which now only are applicable where a resident may have a dual local connection to two or more districts.*
- k. To consider opportunities for expanding the Partnership where it is appropriate and all partners agree. – *Since its inception, the partnership has been extended twice with Test Valley and Eastleigh now active participants.*

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

7. COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 7.1. The Community Strategy Active Communities outcome contains a commitment to ‘support local people in accessing high quality and affordable housing which meets their needs’.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1. There are no direct resource implications resulting from the work of the ISG or from the recommendations made.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The correct and consistent applications of the scheme of allocations is essential to ensure the Council meets its statutory obligation to address housing need in the district.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

[Hampshire Home Choice Annual Report 2015](#)