

TENANTS' FORUM	Agenda Item
Thursday 14 th September 2017	6(ii)

KEYWAYS HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

This report advises the draft Housing Allocations Scheme is being reviewed and seeks the views of the Tenants Forum on the proposed changes.

INTRODUCTION

The Keyways Housing Allocation Scheme provides a framework for the allocation of social and affordable rented homes in our Borough. A review is carried out annually to ensure that the Housing Allocation Scheme remains relevant in meeting local housing needs and responds to changes in the law.

INFORMATION

Over the last year, we have continued to see a significant increase in the demand for social housing. The main features of this increase are:

- Homelessness acceptances in 2017/18 will exceed 200 – almost four times the number in 2014/15.
- An increasing number of homeless applications are from families who are being evicted from the private rented sector
- Private rents are increasingly unaffordable for many people on welfare benefits and low incomes so more people are approaching the Council for help.
- The supply of housing for social rent is not keeping pace with demand, and the turnover of properties available for re-letting has reduced considerably.
- The Council has a duty to secure long term accommodation for homeless households these families and with the private rented sector not usually offering a viable housing solution, the use of temporary accommodation is increasing whilst households are waiting for a social tenancy via Keyways.
- Some homeless households do not currently qualify for Keyways due to previous unacceptable behaviour such as anti-social behaviour or housing-related debt.

Because of the pressures outlined above, the Housing Allocation Scheme needs to ensure that social and affordable housing continues to be prioritised for people in the greatest need who have few alternative housing options.

Revisions to the Housing Allocation Scheme are proposed which respond to the changing policy climate and housing market that we now work in. The main changes are summarised as follows:

- **General change** – a full review of the order and content of the Keyways Housing Allocation Scheme has been carried out with a view to ensuring that the document follows a more logical order, is more streamlined and easier to understand.
- **Handling of Keyways applications from statutory homeless households** –. It is proposed that statutory homeless households will usually be accepted onto Keyways to secure an offer of social housing where they might previously have not qualified, for example due to housing related debt. Such customers will receive greater support to sustain any tenancy offered. Statutory homeless applicants will be able to bid on up to five properties per cycle and officers will have greater flexibility to bid on suitable properties on customer's behalf to maximise the chance of a timely offer.
- **Definition of a child** – The Housing Allocation Scheme has clarified the definition of dependent and non-dependent children in the context of who can be included on an application.
- **Changes to some Band A and Band B criteria relating to medical grounds** – Experience from some recent cases has highlighted anomalies in the level of priority awarded to applicants who require wheelchair adapted accommodation. The Band A criteria 'Major Adaptations' which applied to any applicant requiring such accommodation, has been removed. Applicants previously awarded this band will be re-assigned an appropriate priority for rehousing on medical grounds (Bands A, B, or C) depending on how unsuitable their current accommodation is and what their level of need is (whether severe, urgent or non-urgent).
- **Changes to overcrowding priority** – with the increase in demand for family accommodation, particularly from statutory homeless households, we have reviewed our approach to assessing overcrowding and the priority awarded to overcrowded households. The priority bands relating to overcrowding have been amended to reflect the approach recommended by the Secretary of State. This is

based on a simple 'minimum bedroom standard' approach which looks at the number of bedrooms that an applicant household requires on the basis of the age and gender of household members.

- **Removal of some priority bands** – there are some priority bands that relate to such specific circumstances that none, or very few, applicants have satisfied those banding criteria. It is proposed that these banding criteria are removed on the basis that such cases will meet other priority bands if a housing need exists.

John Conway
Head of Housing
14th September 2017