



AGENDA ITEM: 7

SUMMARY

Report for:	Housing and Communities Overview & Scrutiny
Date of meeting:	28 January 2015
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Local Lettings Plan
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing Julia Hedger, Group Manager Strategic Housing Natasha Brathwaite, Strategic Housing Team Leader (Property)
Purpose of report:	1. To provide Members with an update of how the Strategic Housing Service will allocate new build homes within the borough.
Recommendations	1. For the Committee to note the report.
Corporate objectives:	Affordable housing
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> None.
'Value For Money Implications'	<u>Not applicable</u>
Risk Implications	Risk Assessment – undertaking as part of the Allocations Policy implementation in 2013
Equalities	Equality Impact Assessment - undertaken as part of the Allocations policy implementation in 2013.

Implications	<p>The Council is committed to securing equality of opportunity in all aspects of its activity as a service provider. This means that every effort is made to ensure that all sectors of the community have equal access to services offered by the Council and its housing association partners. The Council recognises its statutory duties under the Equalities Act 2010 to ensure that no person will receive less favourable treatment than others because of age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, sexual orientation, or gender reassignment.</p> <p>The Housing Strategy team ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That advice and information is available about the right to make an application for housing; and • That assistance is given to anyone likely to have difficulty making an application for housing. <p>Information about the allocation scheme will be made available in alternative formats and languages on request. To monitor the effectiveness of this policy, applicants will be asked to complete an 'Equality and Diversity' section in the application form for the housing register.</p> <p>Regular monitoring and evaluation of data and information on homelessness, the housing register and lettings outcomes, will all be fed back into policy reviews and service development.</p>
Health And Safety Implications	Not applicable, covered by the Allocations Policy
Consultees:	<p>Mark Gaynor – Director of Housing & Regeneration</p> <p>Elliott Brooks – Assistant Director of Housing</p> <p>Julia Hedger – Group Manager, Strategic Housing</p> <p>Andy Vincent – Group Manager Strategic Housing</p> <p>Gemma Goacher – Lead Officer Allocations</p> <p>Tenant & Leaseholders Committee</p>
Background papers:	Allocations Policy
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	CBL – Choice Based Lettings

1. Background

1.1 The Allocations policy's primary function is to set out:

- Dacorum Borough Council's (the Council) local priorities in allocating housing accommodation; and
- The Council's local approach to eligibility and qualification to its housing register.

The document seeks to:

- Establish the essential framework enabling the Council to determine the relative priorities between applicants for housing; and
- Provide a comprehensive statement of the procedure that should be followed when considering applications and making allocations.

1.2 The Council is committed to giving fair opportunity to all applicants and reserves the right to make limited numbers of properties available to only homeless applicants; or home-seekers; or transferring tenants, if at any time one or more of these groups' starts to dominate allocations.

The policy sets out:

- The procedures and priorities involved in the initial consideration of an applicant's
- How a bid made by an applicant through the CBL scheme is to be treated.

1.3 The current levels of housing demand in the Dacorum local housing authority area are very high and the Council is under pressure from this high demand to effectively and fairly manage its housing register and stock.

In April 2012 the Council approved its Housing Principles. Of those principles a number relate to allocations and these include:

- Two 'key' Housing Principles

"Give priority to households in the greatest housing need when allocating affordable housing."

"Aim to maximise the use of our housing stock in order to meet housing need." 5

- Three 'further' Housing Principles

"Give preference to local people where possible when allocating housing."

"Work with the local private sector in housing, including the private rented sector."

"Ensure that due consideration is given to any vulnerable client groups."

In its Homelessness Strategy the Council sets out its preventative approach to alleviating the causes of homelessness, which is intended to reduce the pressure on allocations to social housing.

1.4 The Council takes the view that this policy should support efforts to prevent homelessness wherever possible and to manage its consequences, and that this should be viewed as an explicit aim.

1.5 The Council is committed to ensuring that allocations are fairly distributed between homeless applicants, home-seekers and transferring tenants, while always taking into account both the current demand and the stock that is available to let at any one time.

2. Local Lettings plan for new build developments

The Council's Allocations Policy enables the Strategic Housing Service the flexibility to identify particular housing accommodation that it wishes to use to achieve a variety

of housing management and policy objectives. Page 26, Section 9 of the Allocations Policy confirms that the policy allows the Strategic Housing Service to introduce a local lettings plan.

It is proposed that our local lettings plan will assist the Council to make sure that applicants who are being allocated the newly built properties have different family compositions, this will enable communal living to be easier and avoid placing too much demand on communal space. This will encourage diversity of tenants and help provide a balance of tenants and tenant's needs and demands on the communal space. Asking new tenants to sign up to a good neighbour agreement encourages them to take responsibility for their behaviour from the tenancy commencement and will help to prevent any unnecessary additional pressure for the Housing Landlord Team in managing the properties.

The Council's new build properties will be advertised and allocated via the Choice Based lettings scheme, 'Moving with Dacorum'. Applicants who are active on the housing register are eligible to bid for advertised properties that meet their level of household need. The Allocations policy enables the Strategic Housing Service to assess an applicant's housing need and points are awarded to represent their circumstances.

When a property is advertised the applicant with the highest number of points who has placed a bid will be offered this property (pending necessary verification checks). This means that the applicant with the highest level of housing need (points) will be allocated the properties. This achieves the Council's goal of housing local people with a housing need.

The Council wants to foster sustainable communities and manageable communal living, especially in blocks of flats where there is substantial shared space, having a mixed variety of tenants, with different family compositions and needs is more likely to assist in achieving this goal.

2.2 The Nokes 9 x 2 Bedroom flats

- 50% of all children in the building must be over 10 years old

Reason: This is to help provide a balance of tenants and tenants needs and demands on the communal space. For example, this would avoid a situation where all the children in the building require a pushchair, which takes up space getting in and out of the building, even with management tools such as a clear landing policy in place.

- Training on best use of Passivhaus property

Reason: As Passivhaus properties are so different from living in any other kind of home, new tenants will need to be introduced to the principles and mechanisms of looking after such a property. Training will be delivered to tenants by the Strategic Housing Service in partnership with the Architect, to ensure that a comprehensive understanding is gained on how to manage the facilities within the property. Detailed handbooks will also be provided to new tenants. All applicants successful on the shortlists when bidding for these properties will need to complete training, prior to signing up for the tenancy. This will encourage the best use of the property and help keep heating bills and maintenance issues to a minimum.

- Good neighbourhood agreement

Reason: This encourages a pro-active approach to being a good neighbour. This is different from the tenancy agreement which explains what is unacceptable.

- Tenancy sustainment training

Reason: This is compulsory for all home seekers (including homeless applicants) and available for transferring tenants who would benefit. This is to encourage ongoing tenancy sustainment. The training covers:

1. Council tax responsibility
2. The housing register
3. Housing Advice and options
4. Setting up your gas and electricity
5. Understanding your tenancy agreement
6. Paying your rent
7. Where to find second hand/affordable furniture items
8. Where to go for help with financial problems

2.3 Farm Place

26 properties: 6 x 3 bedroom houses

8 x 2 bedroom flats

12 x 1 bedroom flats

- 50% of all children in the flats must be over 10 years old

Reason: This is to help provide a balance of tenants and tenants needs and demands on the communal space. For example, this would avoid a situation where all the children in the building require a pushchair, which takes up space getting in and out of the building, even with management tools such as a clear landing policy in place.

- One bedroom properties to be occupied by couples in at least 50% of allocations

Reason: To encourage diversity of tenants.

- One bedroom properties to be occupied by tenants over 25 years old in at least 75% of allocations.

Reason: To encourage diversity of tenants. It is often the case that the applicants with a one bedroom need and the highest points (and so are in the greatest housing need) an example of this would be care leavers and young people who need to move on from supporting lodgings or shared accommodation to live independently at 18 years of age. Whilst their housing need is high, allowing the majority of one bedroom properties to be allocated to customers who are living alone for the first time may place these clients in a vulnerable situation. The best outcome for vulnerable young people is to move on into a diverse community and live with people who have had different experiences from them.

- Good neighbourhood agreement

Reason: This encourages a pro-active approach to being a good neighbour. This is

different from the tenancy agreement which explains what is unacceptable.

- Tenancy sustainment training

Reason: This is compulsory for all home seekers (including homeless applicants) and available for transferring tenants who would benefit. This is to encourage ongoing tenancy sustainment. The training covers:

9. Council tax responsibility
10. The housing register
11. Housing Advice and options
12. Setting up your gas and electricity
13. Understanding your tenancy agreement
14. Paying your rent
15. Where to find second hand/affordable furniture items
16. Where to go for help with financial problems

3. Next steps

3.1 The Local Lettings plan will be advertised on the Council's website and Moving with Dacorum site.

3.2 Advertisement of these new build properties will commence from 29 January 2015. As the Council are now able to advertise property cycles on a daily basis, the advertisement will be phased over a period of several weeks, to ensure that the Strategic Housing Team apply a planned approach to letting these new homes and absorb these lettings within the current workload.

3.3 Phasing advertisements will also enable applicants several opportunities to bid over the advertised cycles, maximising their opportunity to be considered for these new homes.

3.4 The local lettings plan will be in place for the initial allocations for these new build properties. As and when properties are vacated in the future, they will be advertised via Moving with Dacorum and let in the usual way in line with the Allocations Policy.

3.5 This local lettings plan will apply to all new build developments completed within the borough.