



Report for:	Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	4th March 2020
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Help to Move Policy
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffith, Portfolio Holder for Housing Authors: Layna Warden, Group Manager (Tenants and Leaseholders)
Purpose of report:	1. To set out proposed changes to the Moving to a Smaller Home policy
Recommendations	That members consider the report and comment as appropriate
Period for post policy/project review	12 months from date of report
Corporate objectives:	Affordable Housing Building Community Capacity Modern and efficient council
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> The proposals will reduce the amount we currently give to tenants when downsizing from larger properties however this saving will be offset by increased payments to those moving into Sheltered Housing. Overall the amount spent on supporting tenants to move is expected to reduce by £35,000. <u>Value for money</u>

	Incentivising moves from homes that are more desirable into properties that have lower demand will ensure we receive better value for money from any payments made under this scheme.
Risk implications	We have a legal obligation to follow national guidance and this has been considered to ensure legislation and best practice are upheld
Community Impact Assessment	Community Impact Assessment carried out and attached as Appendix 1
Health and safety Implications	Housing policies, procedures and contracts build in a requirement that all health and safety requirements are met and any higher risk matters are included in our risk register, which identifies specific mitigating actions.
Consultees:	Mark Gaynor – Director (Housing and Regeneration) Fiona Williamson - Assistant Director (Housing) Housing Senior Management Team Housing Operations Meeting
Background papers:	
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	DBC – Dacorum Borough Council MTSH – Moving to a Smaller Home

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report presents the changes made to the Moving to a Smaller Home (MTSH) policy and introduces the revised policy now named Help to Move (Attached at Appendix 2)
- 1.2. A review of the policy has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of the current scheme. The research aimed to identify if the policy provided value for money and ensure it was still relevant and achieving the objectives to incentivise tenants affected by welfare benefit reforms to downsize and reduce rent arrears through occupying properties too large for their needs.
- 1.3. This report highlights findings from analysis of tenants who have downsized and feedback from a tenant survey of those currently under occupying. It also

sets out evidence of the current housing needs from tenants on the Housing Register. Details of schemes by neighbouring authorities are discussed followed by the key changes proposed in the new policy to make better use of our homes and incentivise moves from homes that are in higher demand

2. Background

2.1. Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) initiated the MTSH scheme in light of the changes to welfare benefits in April 2013 and the introduction of the Social Sector Size Criteria. This Scheme replaced the previous incentive schemes in place, Tenants Removal scheme and Under Occupational scheme, which offered different incentives dependent on age of applicants and property type they were moving to.

2.2. The aim of the current policy is to tackle under-occupation in correlation in housing need. 'Freeing up' often highly desirable properties reduces both the number of households on the housing register as well as reducing the most pressing forms of housing need.

2.3. The current scheme is available to introductory, secure or flexible tenants of DBC transferring to accommodation that is more suitable. These properties can be from two up to five bedroom properties including flats, maisonettes, bungalows and houses. This can be either another DBC property or a Housing Association home. To reduce the upheaval and cost of moving the current policy will:

- Arrange and pay for furniture to be packed and moved.
- Arrange for a cooker to be disconnected and to be refitted at the new home
- Arrange and pay for relocation of a washing machine.
- Pay for home telephone to be transferred if applicable.

2.4. The Council will also make a one off payment once your transfer has completed, the amount payable is in accordance with the following scale:

- Giving up 3 or more bedrooms - £2000.00
- Giving up 2 bedrooms - £1000.00
- Giving up 1 bedroom - £500.00

3. Review of existing scheme

3.1. Data from the Survey of English Housing identified that the social rented sector had the highest rate of overcrowding but lowest levels of under occupancy from all housing sectors. In 2017/18 the percentage of those with two or more spare bedrooms rose from 8% to 10% demonstrating there is a continued need nationally to help tenants to downsize from larger homes.

3.2. Reviewing the last 3 years applicants who downsized moved into the following size accommodation:

Year	General needs				Sheltered			Sheltered total	Total all
	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	GN total	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed		
2017	9	6	3	18	29	0	1	30	48
2018	5	5	3	13	42	1	0	43	56
2019	4	2	1	7	20	0	0	20	27

3.3. The data above suggests that older applicants living in large properties do apply to move into smaller accommodation within our sheltered stock and the demand has not subsided over the last 3 years. In 2017, only a third of all tenants who downsized did so into general needs stock. In 2018 and 2019 this has dropped to approximately a quarter of all tenants. Additionally of the 20 general needs tenants that moved over these years, 7 of these were tenants downsizing with arrears to improve their situation and allow the money received as part of the incentive to be offset against their arrears.

3.4. There are over 7000 applicants on the Housing Register. Over 11% of these have under occupation points showing a clear interest to move to smaller homes and that points continue to be an effective incentive to downsizing.

3.5. Of the applicants on the register, the table below details the number of applicants on the housing register as of 30 July 2019 who have stated that they are under occupying their property. Just under 60% of these have one extra bedroom with 36% having 2 spare bedrooms.

Number of rooms under occupied	Status of application	Number of applicants
Under occupying 1 bedroom	Active	338
	Suspended	31
Under occupying 1 bedroom Total		369
Under occupying 2 bedrooms	Active	211
	Suspended	17
Under occupying 2 bedrooms Total		228
Under occupying 3 bedrooms	Active	24
	Suspended	3
Under occupying 3 bedrooms Total		27
Grand Total		624

3.6. While there are still a number of tenants who are in need to downsize the table below shows the overall bedroom need for applicants on the housing register. Smaller homes are considerably more desirable and in greater need.

Max bed size calculated	Active	Suspended	Grand Total
(Not set)	2	18	20
1	4003	857	4860
2	1242	310	1552
3	423	118	541
4	70	25	95
5	9	5	14
6	1	2	3
7		1	1
Grand Total	5750	1336	7086

3.7. Alongside the higher demand of small homes, there is an increasing pressure on adapted homes. 727 adaptations were undertaken at our properties in 2018, of which 204 were major, i.e. through floor lifts, stair lifts, wet rooms, ramping etc. These require a high level of resource in management and staff involvement as well as financial cost. There are a number of homes which have been adapted and are no longer suitable for the tenant's needs or where the changes are no longer needed.

3.8. The evidence above demonstrated there was a clear need for a scheme to encourage tenants to move to more suitable homes. There is less demand and need for larger homes and more for tenants in 1 and 2 bedroom homes to move into sheltered housing, which the current scheme does not give support for.

4. Comparative analysis

4.1. The existing scheme was compared with neighbouring stock retaining Local Authorities to understand what incentives they offer.

4.2. Of the three schemes offered these varied considerably from £250 to £1000 per room downsized. Additionally cash incentives were offered to tenants moving into a sheltered home. One Authority gave tenants a variety of options depending how much support is giving by the Authority to help the tenant through removals and redecorating. Also an award of £250 was given if the home was left in a good condition.

4.3. Two authorities did not offer any incentives for downsizing.

5. Revisions to policy

5.1. Considering the current demands on the housing register and situation of our tenants a number of changes to the policy have been adopted. The name of

the scheme will become Help to Move. This one incentive scheme would cover a number of ways to support tenants to move.

5.2. The financial incentive will be changed to £500 for anyone who is downsizing - no matter how many bedrooms they are reducing by. The highest demand is for 1 and 2 bedroom properties and therefore an increased amount for additional bedrooms is not something to still be prioritised. Supporting those who are under occupying is still needed so the £500 will pay for removals or any other areas the tenant would prefer.

5.3. An incentive payment of £1000 will be given to any DBC tenant moving from a home with Major Adaptations (Level access shower, stair lift, through floor lift, adapted kitchen). This will allow these homes to be given to other households in high need of these adaptations and reduce the need for costly adaptations to other homes.

5.4. Any DBC tenants moving from a general needs property to Sheltered housing will receive an incentive payment of £500. This will incentivise tenants in a one bedroom general needs home to move into homes designated as sheltered to free up these properties.

The below table gives examples of how much tenants would receive under the new scheme.

Help to move scheme examples					
Current property	New Property	Incentive award for downsizing	Moving into sheltered	Moving from home with major adaptations	Total
1 bed general needs	1 bed Sheltered		£500		£500
2 bed general needs	1 bed flat	£500			£500
2 bed property with adaptations	1 bed flat	£500		£1000	£1500
2 bed property	1 bed sheltered	£500	£500		£1000
3 bed house	1 bed flat	£500			£500
3 bed house with adaptations	1 bedroom sheltered	£500	£500	£1000	£2000
4 bed house	2 bed house	£500			£500

5.5. As well as the financial incentive, DBC assist tenants to downsize in a number of other ways. These include giving tenants under-occupying their home greater priority within the Allocations Policy. Tenants can retain one 'spare'

bedroom when moving from a larger home and tenants with rent arrears are permitted to move with rent arrears if regular payments have been made for 6 months. This ensures that those affected by the social size subsidy are given assistance to move to prevent further debt and reduce household bills.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. Our current approach aims to incentivise tenants to move from larger homes to smaller properties. The number of tenants downsizing has reduced over the last 5 years and evidence from the housing register indicates that the highest need is for 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation. The cost of aids and adaptations are high and the number of these needed in our homes is increasing. Additionally there is lower demand for some of our sheltered homes and there are a number of tenants who would benefit by downsizing to this type of property.
- 6.2. The proposals set out in this report and the new policy aim to meet this changing need and prioritise a financial incentive on those moving from greater need homes. Addressing under-occupation will reduce housing need across the borough; help make best use of the housing stock (including reducing the number of expensive major adaptations required) and have a more positive impact on the ability of the Housing Service to collect the rent that is due. The changes to the scheme as set out in the recommendations will allow us to achieve this and ensure better value for the money offered under this policy.