

Portfolio Holder decision record sheet

Name of decision maker: Councillor Mrs Griffiths

Portfolio: Housing

Date of Portfolio Holder decision: 30/09/20

Title of decision: Help to Move Policy and Housing Allocation Policy Amendments

Part II:

Part II reason:

Decision made and reasons:

Decision: To approve the amendments to Help to Move and Housing Allocation Policies, as detailed in this decision sheet.

Reason: To ensure the best use of the social housing stock and enable it to be allocated to those most in need.

Background to report:

1. Changes have been made to the Help to Move Policy (which is replacing the Moving to a smaller Home Policy) to reflect the current demand on council properties and we would like to implement changes with immediate effect.
2. In order for the Allocation Policy to support and work alongside the new Help to Rent Policy, minor amendments are required to existing Allocations Policy which are detailed within this report.
3. The report is also proposing additional changes to our Allocations Policy to review points awarded to applicants living in a parental home with no other housing need and those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This is to ensure that we continue to ensure that properties are allocated to those with the greatest housing need and will help address the demand for one bedroom accommodation.

Reports considered: (here reference can be made to specific documents)

Help to Move Policy
Housing Allocations Policy

Officers/Councillors/Ward Councillors/Stakeholders consulted:

Help to Move Policy:
Tenant consultation
Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Housing Senior Management Team

Allocations Policy:

Group Manager, Strategic Housing
Housing Senior Management Team

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Monitoring Officer comments:

There are no additional comments to add to the report.

Chief Financial Officer comments:

The allocations policy changes will not have an impact on the HRA business plan.

Implications:**Risks:****Value for money:****Options considered and reasons for rejection:****Portfolio Holder's signature:****Date:**

Details of any interests declared and any dispensations given by the Standards Committee:

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Date decision record sheet received from portfolio holder: 09/09/20

Date decision published: 30/09/20

Decision no: PH-016-20

Date of expiry of call-in period: 07/10/20

Date any call-in received or decision implemented:

1. Background – Help to Move Policy

1.1 Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) initiated the Moving to a Smaller Home scheme in light of the changes to welfare benefits in April 2013 and the introduction of the Social Sector Size Criteria. 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.

1.2 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.

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1.3 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

2. Review of existing scheme

2.1 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.

2.2 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

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 2018 and 2019 only a quarter of all tenants that moved into smaller homes, moved into general needs properties.

2.3 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.

2.4 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 application of	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

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2.5 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

2.6 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.

2.7 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.

3. Revisions to Help to Rent policy and Housing Allocations Policy

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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.

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3.4 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

3.5 As well as the financial incentive, DBC assist tenants to downsize in a number of other ways. These include giving tenants under-occupying or moving from general needs to sheltered housing 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 the move will be beneficial to the tenant's financial circumstances. This ensures that those affected by the social size subsidy are given assistance to move to prevent further debt and reduce household bills.

3.6 In order to make best use of our stock and to ensure that applicants that wish to access sheltered housing the proposal is to broaden the criteria for existing social housing tenants who would like to move to a designated elderly person's property owned by the Council or a Housing Association in the Borough. The current criteria only awards sheltered housing points (25 points) to applicants in a bedsit who are over 60 wishing to move to sheltered accommodation or in CAT1 wishing to move to CAT2. The new proposal will extend this further to applicants in general needs, one bedroom accommodation with the intention of allowing those applicants currently unable to access sheltered housing to be able to move if they wish whilst also freeing up accommodation that is high in demand.

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3.7 We are also looking to align the Allocations policy to the Help to Move policy to confirm that where a home with major adaptations is no longer required for the current household but a housing need still exists, panel can agree a to move to a property without adaptations to allow the adapted property to be offered to a family waiting for an adapted property.

4. Conclusion

4.1 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.

4.2 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.

5. Background – Allocations Policy

5.1 A full review of the Allocations Policy is in the early stages as the current policy has been in use for almost three years. Work is currently underway to explore and consider criteria and eligibility within the policy to ensure that our policy will continue to effectively manage the current demand for accommodation and support applicants most in need of housing in the Borough. This will also take into consideration and reflect changes in legislation that have taken place including Homeless Reduction Act, Armed Forces Covenant and Covid-19.

5.2 There are two key areas that have been identified as a priority and as such we are proposing that these changes take effect ahead of the new policy implementation next year.

6. Review of existing points allocation

6.1 An applicant that is 18 or over who is living in their parental home (and has done for a minimum of 12 months) is entitled to 10 sharing points even if there is no other housing need such as overcrowding, medical etc.

6.2 A homeless applicant who meets the eligibility and criteria for the housing register and is in relief stage of the Homeless Reduction Act is entitled to 5 homeless points. If they

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are in shared accommodation such as a hostel or HMO, they also receive 10 sharing points.

6.3 Once points are awarded, an application becomes active allowing time on the register points to be awarded for each year on the register (up to 5 points maximum). Applicants who are homeless or homeseekers can also attend pre tenancy training to receive an additional 5 points.

Example

Applicant one lives with mum and 1 brother in a three bedroom property. Each have their own bedroom.

- Applicant one is awarded *10 sharing points*

Applicant two is homeless (of no fixed abode) and sofa surfing with a friend.

- They meet criteria of Allocations Policy so are awarded *5 homeless points and 10 sharing points*

Active applicants on the register also receive 1 time on the register point for each year on the register (up to a maximum of 5). So although not being at risk of homelessness, having no other housing Need and living in parental home, applicant one can accrue the same level of points as someone who is homeless.

6.4 Analysing the applicants on the housing register as of 10 June 2020, there are 3568 active applicants on the housing register with sharing points.

6.5 2579 of these are only active due to sharing points as they have no other housing need and 89% (2288 applicants) are single applicants so looking for one bedroom properties.

6.6 Of the remaining 988 applicants with sharing points have been awarded 5 homeless points to recognise their housing need as they have no settled accommodation.

7. Conclusion:

7.1 It could be argued that are present, the criteria in the policy is making it possible for council homes to go to applicants that are not in urgent housing need as they have settled accommodation over applicants that are at risk of homelessness or already accessing services as no fixed abode.

7.2 The proposals to address the issues identified are to:

- Remove sharing points for applicants living in their parental home and no other housing need. If applicant applies and they have a housing need as defined in our allocations policy, they will be awarded points accordingly.
- If there only reason for applying is because they live with their parents, their application should be rejected, as there is no identified housing need.

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- Increase award for homeless points from 5 points to 10 points to more appropriately reflect their housing need and to assist with prevention.