

Item 20 - Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Scheme 2022 - 27

The attached report was considered by the Housing & Health Advisory Committee on 14 June 2022. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Housing & Health Advisory Committee (6 June 2022, Minute 10)

The Interim Head of Housing presented the report which outlined the Council's Housing Strategy Allocations Scheme. The report presented a second draft of the Housing Register Allocations Scheme 2022-2027, which had been refined in light of feedback received from a recent public consultation.

The Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Scheme enabled the Council and its partners to work together to ensure that those in most need of affordable housing were prioritised. The Council operated a Choice Based Letting Scheme and the Housing Register Allocations Scheme set out a framework that described how to register, the assessment process and property allocation process. Over 500 responses were recorded including from Members, partners and key stakeholders. The Committee noted their thanks to all those involved in the consultation process.

A few respondents had commented on the difficulties faced by young people who wanted to move to their first independent home, but who were impacted by high property prices and rents combined with low wages/zero hour contracts. As was drafted, people sharing facilities (e.g. young people still living at home with their parents and sharing cooking and bathing facilities, who wanted to live independently), were not classed as having a housing need and were not eligible to join the Housing Register. Therefore, it was recommended that an additional category be added in Band D (low priority) and to create a Local Lettings Plan to give an element of priority, which would be agreed on a site-by-site basis, to this category of applicant on selected schemes.

The current scheme did not require applicants to disclose whether they were staff or Members of the Council or related to, partner of, or living with staff or Members of the Council. It was recommended that this requirement be introduced to protect the Council's interest and that of its employees and elected Members. It was recommended that their status be flagged on the Council's computer system, and failure to disclose this information could result in the application being suspended or cancelled as determined by the designated manager. It was also recommended that applicants for vacant pitches on the Hever Road traveller site were required to join the Housing Register, in the same way that all other applicants requiring housing assistance were required to do. It was suggested that a bespoke allocations policy be prepared for the letting of pitches on Hever Road.

Members discussed the proposal to retain a 'low priority' category band D. It was expressed that adding excess numbers of people onto the register would be unnecessary and have the potential to stretch the Council's resources. Officers confirmed that the long waiting times and low-priority status of young people living with their parents meant that younger, key-workers were discouraged from attaining a place on the register. The additional category would allow a small amount of those essential workers to gain a small percentage priority on the register which would help those younger key workers in high-value areas.

Officers confirmed that for clarity the local connection criteria would be reiterated under the new band category.

Members discussed the need for a local connection requirement should a resident wish to join the housing Register. Residents could be left in limbo should they not be able to afford property within the Sevenoaks district despite being able to find affordable property outside the district. Officers outlined that the constraints of the District did cause problems in terms of the Green Belt and Housing development restrictions.

Members asked questions of clarification regarding the local connection criteria's effect on homeless inhabitants and temporary accommodation. Officers confirmed that the local connection criteria were correlated to a family member or previous home under homeless law. It was confirmed that the homelessness and allocations policies were separate. Applications for temporary accommodation and the housing register were established under separate legislation. The previous local connection criteria had been 6 months. The new criteria had been extended to three years via employment and living which would encourage those that were committed to obtaining social housing. This also encouraged users to seek private accommodation. It was also emphasised that social housing demand outstripped supply.

Members asked clarifying questions as to the requirement to disclose working for or being related to Council employees. It was confirmed that this was recommended for the purposes of transparency to ensure fair claim to social housing. Officers suggested being mindful about a failure to disclose the information being subject to discretion for a period of three years to encourage users to come forward.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- a) the feedback received from the public consultation be noted;
and

- b) following consideration, it be recommend to Cabinet to recommend to Council that the second draft of the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Scheme 2022-2027 be adopted.