GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ALLOCATION POLICY

Cabinet – 13 July 2023

Report of: Chief Officer - People and Places

Status: For Decision

Also considered by:

- Housing & Health Advisory Committee – 14 June 2023

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary: The Sevenoaks District Housing Allocation Policy (SDHRAP) was approved by Cabinet on 7 July 2022 and adopted by Full Council on 19 July 2022. As part of the consultation and adoption of the SDHRAP, it was recommended that applicants for vacant pitches on the Romani Way, Hever Road traveller site would be required to join the Housing Register, in the same way that all other applicants requiring housing assistance are required to do and that a bespoke allocations policy would be prepared for the letting of pitches on this Council-owned site.

This report supports the Key Aim of: The Housing Strategy 2022-2027 and the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy 2022-2027

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Perry Cole

Contact Officer: Sharon Donald, Ext. 7131

Recommendation to Housing & Health Advisory Committee:

To consider the draft Gypsy and Traveller Allocation Policy

Recommendation to Cabinet:

That, subject to any comments, the draft Gypsy and Traveller Allocation Policy, be approved and adopted for implementation

Reason for recommendation: To align the allocation of pitches at Romani Way, Hever Road with the SDHRAP. To set out how we will prioritise applicants and ensure that those who have a recognised housing need and are eligible for housing at Romani Way are able to apply. To make sure that pitches are allocated in a fair and transparent manner to households who are eligible and fall within the required definition.

Introduction and Background

1   The Council-owned Gypsy and Traveller site at Romani Way, Hever Road, Edenbridge, consists of 16 pitches. Currently applications for housing on the site are made directly to the Private Sector Housing Team, with details held on file and allocated in date order (subject to required checks).

During the consultation process for the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy 2022-2027 (SDHRAP), the current method for application and allocation of vacant pitches at Romani Way was reflected upon. The current method had been put in place prior to the introduction of Kent HomeChoice (Choice Based Lettings) which is used for the application and allocation of social housing.

With the approaching implementation of a new SDHRAP for the District and taking account of how social housing is now allocated, it was felt necessary to review the process for Romani Way and put a bespoke allocation policy in place for the allocation of vacant pitches.

2.   Progress to date

Following research of current Gypsy and Traveller Allocation Policies and consultations, a draft policy has been prepared.

The draft policy seeks to deliver a sustainable community at Romani Way, whilst taking account of housing need and with a local connection criteria being included to embrace the culture of the gypsy and traveller community.

Officers from SDC met with residents of Romani Way on 22 March 2023, to discuss the emerging policy and to better understand their priorities for the site. The meeting was well attended and positive.

The main points of the Allocation Policy were considered and discussed. This included:-

- All interested applicants will need to apply to join the Housing Register and provide all required documentation prior to inclusion;

- Registered applicants will be prioritised using the SDHAS Banding criteria and placed into the relevant Band;

- Close family connections and length of time on the original waiting list will be taken into account;

- It is anticipated that vacant pitches will be advertised on Kent HomeChoice (subject to the new software being in place in time) – if this is not possible, vacant pitches will be advertised on the Council's website;

- Following advertisement, a shortlist of the top 3 applicants will be considered by a panel;

- The panel which will consist of officers from the Accommodation Team and an independent advocate for the residents of Romani Way.

The consensus of residents attending the meeting was that the introduction of a new Gypsy and Traveller Allocation Policy would be a fair and transparent method of allocating pitches when they become available at Romani Way.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

None.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Resource (non-financial)

Actions and progress to date have been delivered within existing resources.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The current application procedure is open to challenge. Introducing a revised process which is in line with the Council's overarching SDHRAP will ensure the method is open and transparent and meets current legislation.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

The existing allocation policy has been in place for many years and precludes the introduction of Kent HomeChoice – the Choice Based Lettings function for the allocation of all social housing in Kent. The introduction of a bespoke allocation policy for housing at Romani Way, Hever Road takes account of the Council's SDHAP whilst considering the culture of the gypsy and traveller community. The new policy

will bring the process in line with the advertisement and letting of social housing within the district and provide a fair and transparent method of allocating pitches when they become available.

Appendices
Appendix A – Gypsy and Traveller Allocation Policy
Background Papers
None

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – People & Places