

Housing Best Value Sub-Committee – 8 April 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Housing Best Value Sub-Committee** held on **8 April 2005** when there were present:-

Cllr P F A Webster (Chairman)

Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr T Livings

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P K Savill and Mrs M S Vince

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Clarkson - Head of Revenue and Housing Management
S Neville - Residential Service Unit Manager
D Upham - Housing Projects Manager
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

29 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

30 AMENDMENTS TO THE LETTINGS POLICY 2003

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on amendments to the lettings policy introduced in January 2003, particularly the definition for key workers.

In presenting the report, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management tabled an update document identifying amendments proposed by officers following formulation of the original report.

Key Workers

It was recognised that a number of organisations/authorities, including Braintree District Council, had developed definitions of the term “key worker”. Officers confirmed that any definition should included sub-criteria to provide for the specific assessment of an individual’s financial circumstances and their local connection.

It was also confirmed that there was a specific need to provide a definition of key worker and associated criteria for the purposes of enabling the allocation of units of accommodation reserved for key workers at the Housing Corporation funded schemes in the District.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- Once an applicant had been awarded key worker or any other form of local authority housing, they would be able to remain with the property regardless of any improved future financial circumstances or change of employment.
- A local authority could change its policy on key workers at any time, although it is of value to retain some stability from the applicant's points of view.
- Officers proposed the introduction of a banding scheme framed around the criteria set out in the report with individuals falling within proposed Band A always having priority over bands B, C and D.
- There was nothing to preclude the Authority from introducing a band that required applicants to be members of a specific profession, such as teaching. Officers had written to all organisations where it was felt there may be a need for assistance with key worker housing and had been surprised at the low response. These were confined to:-
 - A nurse working at Southend Hospital and living in Rayleigh.
 - A hospital worker at Southend living in Rochford
 - A health care assistant working in Southend but living in Rochford
 - A Customs and Excise Officer working in Southend and living in Rochford
 - A Teaching Assistant who works and lives in Rochford
- Persons within key worker housing looking to move on could register with the Council for a transfer and attract points for other types of local authority accommodation in the same way as all individuals.

During debate, Members concurred with the observation of the Chairman that there were many illogical aspects to the introduction of a key worker definition. Problems included:-

- There being no national definition.
- Once allocated, individuals could remain in properties regardless of significantly improved financial circumstances.
- In considering job related categories for a key worker definition it became very difficult to distinguish one group from another.
- Every resident would have his/her own views on what should constitute a key worker. This would depend on their individual circumstances.

- The fact that every authority could have its own definition made matters very complicated, particularly for applicants.

It was agreed that, given the above factors and also given that Housing Corporation funding requirements meant that a key worker definition was required for applicants to the designated properties, it would be appropriate to consider identifying a definition for these properties only. The fact that there had been so little specific interest in the provision of key worker housing within the District was particularly salient.

It was agreed that the definitions proposed by officers within the report could be accepted for the purpose of filling the vacant units.

Financial Considerations

Responding to questions, officers advised that applicants for housing had to declare tax credits/family allowance and that gross salary was taken into account. Arrangements were similar to those in place for housing benefit entitlement. There would always be issues associated with identifying income received from the 'cash economy'.

With regard to the financial resources calculation, the Sub-Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to delete the first sentence under 'Private Renting' and to remove reference to debts under the 'Buying of Property' heading.

The Sub-Committee endorsed the remainder of the proposals in the report and associated update document.

Inspection of Temporary Accommodation

The Sub-Committee agreed that this could be deleted as Committee agreement was not required.

Transfers

The Sub-Committee endorsed the proposals in the report and associated update document.

Reasonable Preference

The Sub-Committee endorsed the proposals in the report and associated update document.

Accommodation Size Provisions

The Sub-Committee endorsed the proposals in the report and associated update document.

Sharing Facilities

The Sub-Committee endorsed the proposals in the report and associated update document

RECOMMENDED to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) That, for the necessary purpose of identifying key workers for the identified Housing Corporation funded projects, the definition of key worker be as follows:-

“ a key worker is an individual who works in either the public sector or whose employment is of particular importance to the community”

and that a banded approach be adopted to the letting of these units as set out in the report.
- (2) That, apart from its specific application to the identified projects, the term ‘key worker’ be removed from the lettings policy.
- (3) That the financial criteria that will be used to assess a person’s affordability to rent privately or purchase a property, as set out in the report and associated update document, be inserted into the lettings policy.
- (4) That the five points for not having a separate garden with children be removed from the lettings policy.
- (5) That the Council reserve the right to deviate from the points system in order to allocate an extensively adapted property for the disabled to someone in need of that adaptation.
- (6) That the Reasonable Preference category of the letting policy be expanded to read – “people who need to move to a particular locality in the District where failure to move would cause hardship to themselves or others. This may be due to a need to access medical treatment, to give or receive care, or to take up employment, education or training opportunity.”
- (7) That there be no alteration to the policy in respect of accommodation provisions where that accommodation has small bedrooms or unusual layout.
- (8) That the policy on shared facilities be altered for clarification to read – “you share with a relative, but are a separate family/household or an extended family”.

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The meeting commenced at 10.30am and closed at 12.05pm.

Chairman

Date