

REVISION OF THE COUNCIL'S LETTINGS POLICY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council's lettings policy has been redrafted to incorporate the recommendations of the Community & Overview Scrutiny Committee on 15 September 2005 (Minute 345/05), which were subsequently endorsed by the Community Services Committee on 4 October 2005. The proposed amendments are highlighted in Appendix 1. The opportunity has also been taken to make a small number of clarificatory changes and to set out the pointing matrix in a clearer style.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 As stated in Minute 345/05 and the detailed accompanying report on Sheltered Housing, it was agreed to amend the current Lettings Policy. The amendments to effect these changes are now submitted for Members' approval.

3 ALTERATIONS TO THE POLICY

- 3.1 The new policy incorporates the wish of Members that those people who are in a position to make their own housing arrangements without recourse to use of social housing should not normally be housed by the Council. The text of the existing policy has been adjusted accordingly and these changes are highlighted.
- 3.2 The Audit Commission remarked at the time of their last inspection on the complexity of the Council's lettings policy, particularly in respect of how points are calculated. In these circumstances, the opportunity has been taken to address this matter and to set out the Points Scheme in a user-friendly format in accordance with best practice.
- 3.3 In addition to the changes mentioned above it is proposed to make two other smaller amendments to the policy in respect of domestic violence and men with regular access to their children.

Men with Access

- 3.4 Under our current policy applicants who are divorced/separated and have access to children are only offered a 1-bedroom property regardless of the number of children they have. This can cause difficulties not only due to the restricted room for their children to visit them but they can be refused access by the courts, as they do not have adequate room for their children to stay.

- 3.5 Other local authorities often take this into consideration; for example, both Southend and Basildon offer men with access an additional bedroom i.e. a 2-bedroom property.
- 3.6 For this to be justified strong evidence would be needed to prove that children will be staying with applicants on a regular basis. It is anticipated that this will only occur in a very few number of cases.
- 3.7 It is recommended that our policy is widened to allow men in this position to have the opportunity for an additional bedroom where evidence is provided and they request a 2-bedroom property. However, those who decide not to wait for a 2-bedroom property (the list is much longer) and accept a 1-bedroom property will not then be entitled to transfer to a larger property.

Domestic Violence

- 3.8 The policy currently states 'If you or a member of your household needs to recover from the effects of violence (including racial attacks) or threats of violence or physical, emotional or sexual abuse and the allegations have been investigated and proved on a balance of probabilities.' Then an additional 10 points are awarded.
- 3.9 This level of points is very low compared with other elements of the policy where more points are awarded for medical conditions, overcrowding, moving from floating support or accepted as homeless in temporary accommodation. Often people in these circumstances are living in constant fear and have psychological problems that may be reduced if they are moved quickly.
- 3.10 Other local authorities such as Brentwood, Tendering and Luton all offer 30 points for applicants in this position. It is, therefore, recommended that the points be increased in line with other local authorities.
- 3.11 Current procedures will continue in respect of severe cases of domestic violence and will be forwarded directly to the Head of Revenue & Housing Management by the Assistant Community Safety Officer. The Head of Service has delegated authority to advance such a move.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 These changes will affect a number of applicants on the housing register to whom the reasons for the policy changes will need to be explained e.g. the need to house those in the greatest need, so as to make the best use of the very limited Council housing stock.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Staff within the Housing Management section will need to amend the points awarded to housing register applicants to reflect the changes. The affected applicants will then need to be advised of their new position on the Register. It is anticipated that the existing staff as part of the annual register review will absorb this work.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **recommends**
amendments to the Lettings Policy as detailed.

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Background Papers: -

Allocation Policies for Basildon, Brentwood, Luton, Southend and Tendring Councils.

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