

REPORT TO: OSC (Pre-decision item)

DATE: Wednesday 6th September 2017

REPORT TITLE: Housing Allocation Scheme – update on consultation

REPORT AUTHOR/S:

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PURPOSE OF REPORT: This report is regarding the Housing Allocations Scheme consultation and is being brought to the committee in its capacity to examine items in a 'pre-decision' capacity. Primarily for information and update on a local issue that will involve policy change upon its conclusion. It also allows for further feedback from OSC members as part of the overall consultation process.

SUMMARY: The report outlines the background to and consultation process engaged thus far and provides some headline information regarding how the consultation is engaging local people ahead of the closure of the window on Friday 8th September 2017. It also sets out the broad timetable of activity leading to sign-off in 2018.

1. BACKGROUND

As part of the local authorities ambition to deliver its strategic aims and to ensure we remain forward focused and robust in service delivery the council's Strategy and Policy Hub Team, with support and guidance from senior departmental officers has engaged in a review and refresh of the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme. This process has now reached the stage where it is out to formal consultation.

We are reviewing our Housing Allocations Scheme in order to continue to prioritise applicants fairly, continue to meet all our legal duties, develop how we prevent homelessness, continue to effectively manage estate regeneration and temporary housing pressures, make the way we allocate socially rented homes clearer for everyone to understand and finally to act on the commitment we made in 2012 to review the Scheme.

We are aiming to simplify the scheme, so that members of the public understand as clearly as possible the realistic options available to them and to reduce the risk of litigation which an overly complex scheme can create.

We are changing how we structure the document, how we explain processes, and how we group applicants based on their types of needs. We are making some changes on how we assess applicants' eligibility for joining the housing

register; how applicants are prioritised based on their needs; and how we work with applicants who do not make bids.

We are also aiming to reduce the size of the register to realistic levels in order to realign expectation and reality more closely and reduce the administrative burden. This includes introducing a threshold of points an applicant will need in order to be able to bid.

2. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The work delivered so far by officers has been characterised by the complexity of the subject area. The Housing Allocations Scheme review commenced in October 2015 however in response to wider changes in policy and legal challenges presenting elsewhere in the country it was not until June 2017 that the document was put out to formal consultation.

As stated the aim of the refresh of the HAS was to endeavour to make it easier to understand, more clearly defined and equitable. There was an acknowledgement from the outset that this would not 'solve' the housing challenge for Enfield but would simplify the 'rationing' process of available resource.

The second main challenge facing the local authority has been to try and ensure that those most likely to be affected by the policy have the opportunity to participate in the consultation process. To this end the Strategy and Policy Hub Manager, working with fellow managers in Consultation and Resident Engagement Services (CREST), Housing Services and Third Sector Development Teams with the assistance of local community sector organisations have engaged in an innovative consultation approach (over 10 of these 'community sessions' have been held at the time of writing this report). This approach has included officers carrying out fieldwork in local community buildings to engage directly with communities from across a broad range of interest groups. This has augmented the on-line consultation process which itself has been supported through a publicity campaign involving libraries, community buildings, Facebook and other (social) media channels.

We have also proactively engaged with a range of other strategically important forums including the Housing Board, registered social housing providers (8th September 2017), Health and Well-being Board, the Enfield Voluntary Sector Strategy Group, Enfield Racial Equalities Council, Enfield Youth Parliament, Enfield Parent Engagement Panel and KRATOS (Children in Care Council). We have used banner advertisements on the council website, utilised Enfield Connected and secured page space in 'Our Enfield' magazine and coverage in the local press. We believe the approach to be comprehensive and proportionate to the task.

The most recent update report from CREST indicates that we have had a positive response to our efforts. On the 19th August 2017, the Council had received 487 responses from the public to the consultation. This is despite

the complexity of the consultation 'ask' which by its very nature has demanded much of responders'. The Hub Team were able to mitigate some of this by providing easy-read versions, limited language support (inc. BSL) and by officers locating themselves in community settings.

It is encouraging to note that there is evidence we have reached many of our target audience (so far) with 33% of respondents claiming either Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit; 23% of respondents have a disability of long term health problem and 36% of respondents are from a BME community.

Preliminary oversight of responses received thus far would appear to indicate a largely favourable response to the proposed changes.

There remains 20 days left on the consultation and we hope that the flow of respondents will continue following a final series of publicity messaging initiated in late August 2017.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note/receive the report for information/discussion as part of their pre-decision scrutiny function.

4. NEXT STEPS

The consultation will close on Friday 8th September 2017 and the responses will be analysed and evaluated by the corporate hub team. The subsequent report of the consultation response will be shared and discussed with the Executive Management Team at the Council and with the Cabinet Member by late September/early October 2017.

A final version of the Housing Allocations Scheme document will then be produced with an anticipated presentation to Cabinet for approval in February 2018.

The Strategy and Policy Hub Team are already in discussion with those in an operational capacity who will be charged with ensuring that the organisation is ready to implement the new scheme when it goes live in 2018 and a handover schedule is being finalised.