

Wards Affected:

All

ITEM 11**CABINET****4 DECEMBER 2018****CHOICE BASED LETTINGS**

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Long (Cabinet member for Housing and Regeneration)

Report Sponsor: Michael Kelleher
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Executive Summary:

On 6 November 2018, Cabinet approved a draft allocation policy for consultation. This policy supports the creation of a housing register and the implementation of Choice Based Lettings (CBL).

CBL is a system where all available homes are advertised to those who have been accepted onto the housing register as having a housing need.

It is anticipated that with the implementation of CBL, along with a new allocation policy and housing register, that applicants and supporting services have a clearer and more realistic view of their chances of being allocated social housing.

This report recommends the implementation of CBL in line with the modernisation of the homelessness service including the introduction of a new allocation policy and housing register.

Councillor Nigel Long, Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 To approve the introduction of Choice Based Lettings - to include the allocation of Council stock and registered provider stock (with the potential to expand into the private sector following consultation with private landlords).

2. Issues

2.1 The Council does not, currently, have a housing register, which leads to a lack of transparency for customers applying for housing in Milton Keynes, as well as services and agencies supporting their clients.

2.2 Under the current allocation policy, offers of accommodation are made manually with officers matching applicants to properties. This includes a mixture of Council accommodation and nominations to Registered Providers. As applicants have little choice over the property they are offered, the chance of rejection is high; often because the property is in the wrong area, too far from schools or shops, or doesn't have certain amenities.

2.3 Offers of accommodation are currently prioritised for those currently in temporary accommodation where a full homelessness duty under Housing Act 1996 Part VII has been accepted, and then those in Band 1 under the allocation policy. This effectively incentivises applications under Part VII of Housing Act 1996 as a route to social housing. This results in increasing pressures in temporary accommodation costs and demands on officers.

2.4 Realistic expectations around waiting times for housing are currently difficult to set.

3. **Options**

3.1 Do nothing – the allocation of housing would continue in the current method, which lacks transparency and choice for customers. This would not be the preferred option.

3.2 Introduce CBL - to include the allocation of Council stock and registered provider stock (with the potential to expand into the private sector following consultation with private landlords). *This is the preferred option.*

3.3 CBL would allow customers the opportunity to bid for accommodation available to them, Council stock, registered providers and the private rented sector subject to consultation with private landlords. This would improve transparency and would support customers to make more informed choices about where they would like to live. This would reduce the chances of applicants refusing an offer and support longer term tenancy sustainability.

3.4 It is anticipated that CBL would also reduce calls and footfall as it sets clear expectations, reducing the need for customers and support services to make ongoing enquiries about the progress of a housing application by putting the applicant in control of the allocation process.

3.5 The introduction of CBL, alongside a new allocation policy, should reduce the demand on homelessness services, which is currently seen as the route into social housing. It could bring about a culture change as well as reduce the need for temporary accommodation.

4. **Implications**

4.1 Policy

CBL will support priority 2 of the emerging Housing Strategy to enable the Council to better manage the demand for housing in the borough.

The implementation of digital services in relation to managing requests for housing, in particular the creation of an online application supports the key principals identified in the Council's Digital Strategy 2018-2025.

4.4 Resources and Risk

£80k in revenue costs including the addition of staffing (x2 officers) and training have been identified. This budget pressure is going through the 2019/20 budget setting process in anticipation.

£60k in capital costs have been identified to procure an IT system (including software licence purchase, annual support, maintenance charge and implementation).

A £20k grant has been awarded by the Local Government Association to support our digital work on creating an on-line housing register and needs to be implemented by March 2018 in line with the grant requirements.

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|---|---------|---|------------------|---|------------------|
| Y | Capital | Y | Revenue | N | Accommodation |
| Y | IT | N | Medium Term Plan | N | Asset Management |

4.5 Carbon and Energy Management

N/A

4.6 Legal

S166A Housing Act 1996 VI states that the Council must either offer people who are being offered accommodation a choice, or the opportunity to express preferences about the housing accommodation allocated to them.

4.12 Equality Act implications

An equality impact assessment has been completed and found that a more open and clearer system will support people to understand their options better and so will advance equality of opportunity.

Having regard to the present system, this was not clearly understood by a significant number of customers. This may have led to perceptions that the system was unfair. There is a considerable body of evidence showing that disadvantage experienced by some groups, when there is a lack of knowledge about the availability of social housing, can lead to discrimination in receiving offers of accommodation from local authorities. That is why changing the system of housing allocation will be beneficial.

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|---|----------------------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|
| Y | Equalities/Diversity | Y | Sustainability | Y | Human Rights |
| Y | E-Government | Y | Stakeholders | N | Crime and Disorder |

Annex(es):

None