

PROGRESS AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. That the Cabinet should immediately investigate the cessation of the current Housing Allocation Scheme, the rejection of the proposed new Housing Allocation Scheme and the introduction of a choice-based letting scheme.

Action: Paper presented to March 2016 Cabinet outlining Council's proposals. Cabinet agreed that:

- The potential impact of the introduction of a new allocations scheme such as a Choice Based Lettings that is unique to Milton Keynes be noted and consultations with other housing providers, stakeholders and other interested parties to explore this further be carried out.
- That discussions with other councillors, as appropriate, be continues and a further report be considered by Cabinet in due course.

Target Date: September 2016

Progress: Homelessness Review carried out by HQN and draft Homelessness Strategy prepared for public consultation during autumn 2016.

Status: Ongoing

2. That the Council should seek to introduce the best, cost-effective, choice-based letting scheme distilled from the letting schemes of those authorities.

Action: See Recommendation 1 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 1 above

Progress: See Recommendation 1 above

Status: See Recommendation 1 above

3. That a greater link between officers dealing with Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and officers who deal with homelessness be established. Arrangements between these two areas of the Council need to be much more flexible.

Action: Improved relationships to be established

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: A process is now in place to ensure referrals can be made more easily and decisions are reached more quickly.

Status: New procedures agreed and now operational

4. That the Cabinet should consider the feasibility of making more homes available by removing designation of specialist use from certain properties. Part of the problem with the supply of accommodation is the lack of flexibility within the system. The Group is concerned that there must be flexibility with sensitivity however, so that the accommodation remains appropriate to households in proximity, for example within a housing scheme. The use, therefore, of specialist accommodation should not become a 'free for all'.

Action: Review designated properties

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: Designation of properties is regularly reviewed and changes made where appropriate. This has been useful in a limited number of cases, such as managing hospital discharges, but can create risks around Right to Buy and the impact on the settled community eg a row of OAP bungalows.

There is close liaison between the Housing Team and the Older Peoples Housing Service in Adult Social Care.

Status: New procedures agreed and operational

5. That when homes are adapted for specialist use, they should remain available for all to use, and not just those who need the adaptations. The Group recognises, however, that for example those with disabilities would have the priority on homes that were adapted for specialist use.

Action: If no-one with specific needs can be identified for an available adapted property then let the property to a 'non-specialist' applicant.

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: All allocations are made to make the best use of accommodation available. Where there is no demand for a particular adaptation, the property will be allocated as 'general needs' housing and adaptations, such as stair lifts removed.

Status: New procedures agreed and operational

6. That the Cabinet should explore new sources of temporary accommodation. One solution could be imaginative and innovative conversion of Council buildings that may not have been designed as homes originally, for example office or retail buildings and schools.

Action: A range of solutions to be explored to increase the number of units available.

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: A number of initiatives have led to an additional 160 units of temporary accommodation being procured between October 2015 and May 2016, with a further 87 units in the pipeline. New opportunities are regularly explored and taken forward where appropriate.

The Council is working with its partner, Your MK, to explore innovative, temporary and permanent housing solutions.

Status: Ongoing

7. That the analysis should be considered by Cabinet before the end of 2015, so that any proposed changes can be introduced at the beginning of the new Council year.

Action: See Recommendation 1 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 1 above

Progress: See Recommendation 1 above

Status: See Recommendation 1 above

8. That the Cabinet should refrain from making any changes to the current system until it has reviewed the possibility of adopting a choice-based letting system.

Action: See Recommendation 1 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 1 above

Progress: See Recommendation 1 above

Status: See Recommendation 1 above

9. That in order to manage the expectations of each applicant, if a choice-based letting scheme is adopted, they should receive a clear explanation beforehand on how the system operates and for which properties they would be eligible, and on the point of bidding, whether or not they are eligible for that specific property. The explanation should be provided in written form and also included in the computer-based instructions as each person applies.

Action: See Recommendation 1 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 1 above

Progress: See Recommendation 1 above

Status: See Recommendation 1 above

10. A single point of contact (SPC) should be provided for all applicants and private landlords. It should be the responsibility of this named SPC to deal with any queries. If for any reason the SPC is not going to be available (for example, because they are on leave), arrangements should be made for a substitute while they are away, and all clients should be provided with contact details.

Action: Suite of leaflets created which include the contact details of a case worker. Case worker stays as the SPC until a decision is reached, then applicants are given a named case worker in the Moving Homes team.

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: Information sheets, including details of their named caseworker are now provided to all applicants. Services are tailored to meet individual needs as required.

Status: New procedures agreed and operational

11. That homeless people should be contacted at least once a week by the named individual who is their single point of contact.

Action: Suite of leaflets created, and including the contact details of a case worker. Case worker stays as the point of contact until a decision is reached, then applicants are given a named case worker in the Moving Homes team.

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: Due to the volume of work and increasing caseload, it is not realistic to make contact with every applicant on a weekly basis. Service users can call and speak to an officer for an update on their case at any time during office hours.

Status: New procedures agreed and operational

12. That contact between the named individual who is the single point of contact and the homeless person needs to include a detailed written sheet with all the information they will need. This may require sensitivity to any needs such as translation, low reading ability or large print.

Action: See Recommendations 10 and 11 above

Target Date: See Recommendations 10 and 11 above

Progress: See Recommendations 10 and 11 above

Status: See Recommendations 10 and 11 above

13. That the Cabinet should examine all means by which Homes in Partnership can be enhanced. The proposition should be improved, for example, by including a golden handshake and guaranteeing repairs, gas certificates etc. The Homes in Partnership Scheme should also be improved by making support of the tenant an integral part of it.

Action: Agreed the development of an enhanced HIP Scheme

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: New EPSL scheme was launched on 1/1/16 and 13 properties are now in use with a further 7 in the pipeline.

The structure of the Housing Options service is currently under review and resources need to be allocated to ensure the greatest possible improvement. However, the work being done with private landlords, particularly regarding EPSL, is providing a strong foundation to take this forward.

Status: New procedures agreed and operational

14. That the the Council should seriously consider becoming a letting agent in its own right, both of its own properties and those managed for others. It could thus attract smaller landlords by advertising that this would make it easier and simpler for them to operate their business.

Action: See Recommendation 13 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 13 above

Progress: See Recommendation 13 above

Status: See Recommendation 13 above

15. That in the event that the Council became a letting agency, the regeneration companies used by the Council could be invited to tender for maintenance contracts, offering an economy of scale.

Action: See Recommendation 13 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 13 above

Progress: See Recommendation 13 above

Status: See Recommendation 13 above

16. That as the level of Local Housing Allowance is based on a formula that disadvantages Milton Keynes as a growing conurbation, the Chief Executive should write to the two Milton Keynes Members of Parliament, explaining that Milton Keynes is a special case and requesting that they pursue the need for Milton Keynes to be considered as such.

Action: Letter to be developed

Target Date: September 2015

Progress: Letter sent to MPs as requested

Status: Complete

17. That in order to increase the supply of accommodation, the Council should revisit how to bring empty, privately-owned property back into use. This should include consideration of compulsory purchase.

Action: Consider the use of legislation which is available to deal with long term, problematic empty houses.

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: Each case is assessed on its merits and Milton Keynes does not have a significant problem with empty homes, but recognises the need to respond quickly to reports of such properties. The Private Sector Housing team carry out visits and work in partnership with Capacity Grid to return properties to use. Compulsory purchase is being explored as a solution to one long-term, problematic, empty home.

Status: Ongoing

18. That in view of the ongoing increase in acceptance by the Council of a duty to house applicants, and as part of the review of the Housing Allocations Scheme, the Cabinet should review the qualifying criteria for acceptance of that duty, for example how long applicants need to have lived in Milton Keynes.

Action: See Recommendation 1 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 1 above

Progress: See Recommendation 1 above

Status: See Recommendation 1 above

19. That Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) should be permitted to allow affordable homes to be built on its land without the requirement to seek best value. This would result in a saving to the actual cost of house building and contribute towards the relieving of pressure on the use of temporary accommodation. The Cabinet should also use its relationship with MKDP as an opportunity to build affordable housing in partnership with registered social landlords (housing associations).

Action: From a planning perspective MKDP acts as any other developer and is already entitled to propose schemes with greater than 30% affordable housing. Ownership of land is not generally material to planning.

Local Plan Policy H9 encourages a range of tenures.

Target Date: 2026

Progress: Leader has announced that 35% of all new developments in Milton Keynes will be affordable or social housing; 28,000 new homes are planned over the next ten years.

Status: Ongoing

20. That in line with the recommendation above on Milton Keynes Development Partnership, the Council should review the stipulated percentage of affordable housing to allow a minimum of 30% affordable housing on Council land, which would enable Milton Keynes Council to determine a higher percentage on the land it currently owns through Milton Keynes Development Partnership.

Action: See Recommendation 19 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 19 above

Progress: See Recommendation 19 above

Status: See Recommendation 19 above

21. That the TFG also suggests that the current requirement for 30% affordable housing in developments be reviewed.

Action: Planning policy matters go through a Cabinet Advisory Group as part of the production of Plan MK and a series of meetings will be set up through to year end to move plan production forwards.

Target Date: 2026

Progress: Leader has announced that 35% of all new developments in Milton Keynes will be affordable or social housing; 28,000 new homes are planned over the next ten years.

Status: Ongoing

22. That in the short term, measures should be taken to ensure that the current requirement for 30% affordable housing in developments is adhered to.

Action: See Recommendation 1 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 1 above

Progress: See Recommendation 1 above

Status: See Recommendation 1 above

23. That the Council should be at the forefront of identifying land to build hostels and identify larger properties that could be adapted to become hostels.

Action: Housing and Planning are working together to identify potential sites for hostels which may be suitable for development/re-development or conversion.

Target Date: December 2015

Progress: Each case is assessed on its merits and Milton Keynes does not have a significant problem with empty homes, but recognises the need to respond quickly to reports of such properties. The Private Sector Housing team carry out visits and work in partnership with Capacity Grid to return properties to use. Compulsory purchase is being explored as a solution to one long-term, problematic, empty home.

Status: New procedures agreed and operational

24. That the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) needs to reflect accurately the genuine needs of the area according to current Council policy. Accurate reflection of the figures in the SHMA, taking into account changes in policy, may show a change in levels of expected tenures and sizes.

Action: Policy H5 states that the proportion of affordable housing that the Council will seek on individual sites will vary depending on site and market conditions. Whilst the strict enforcement of the 30% affordable housing target is supported, the government's approach is to apply significant weight to the viability of developments. Planning Practice Guidance specifically notes that "Where affordable housing contributions are being sought, planning obligations should not prevent development from going forward". Conversely, there is no policy mechanism whereby the Council can secure greater than 30% affordable housing if viability is particularly strong. This can only be achieved if purposefully offered by a developer. The introduction of starter homes and the impact these will have on the provision of traditional, affordable housing types will make it more difficult to achieve.

Target Date:

Progress:

Status:

25. That the TFG would hope that Cabinet would consult with the TFG when it makes its decision and would be happy to reconvene to consider any proposals.

Action: See Recommendation 1 above

Target Date: See Recommendation 1 above

Progress: See Recommendation 1 above

Status: See Recommendation 1 above