

# Meeting: Housing Sub-Committee

**Date: 26 November 2018**

## **Title: North Tyneside Council Lettings Policy Review (2018)**

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**Service Area:** Housing

**Wards affected:** All

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 To brief members of the committee on the proposed changes to the North Tyneside Council's Lettings Policy 2018.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 It is recommended that the committee approves the content of this report.

### **3. Background Information**

3.1 North Tyneside Lettings Policy was reviewed in 2016, where some significant changes were made. It is good practice to review the Lettings Policy every two years in order to respond to policy changes and the local housing market. The 2018 review will refine the existing policy and take into account any new legislation where relevant.

### **4. Housing Register**

4.1 Since the last review, the numbers on the Housing Register have reduced by reviewing the register, allocating North Tyneside Living (NTL) homes and a new approach to empty homes management. In March 2016 there were 4,652 applicants on Housing Register, currently there are 3,868 applicants. These are allocated in the following bands:-

- Band 1 = 12
- Band 2 = 496
- Band 3 = 1376
- Band 4 = 111
- Band 5 = 1696
- Band 6 = 177

4.2 In the last year 1630 applicants were re-housed, of which 146 were homeless applicants, 1011 were Housing Register applicants, 427 were Transfers and 46 were housed via direct lets.

## 5. Proposed Changes

5.1 The proposed changes to the Lettings policy are in the following areas:

- Homelessness
- Equity – Owner Occupiers
- Transfers (current tenants)
- Responsible Tenants (current tenants)
- Accepting Offers/Refusals

### 5.2 Homelessness

5.2.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. This changed the way services are delivered to households who present as homeless, at risk of homeless or in need of housing advice. The Act placed a duty on local authorities to assist all households to try and 'prevent' homelessness, with an extended time limit of 56 days (previously 28 days). If this is not possible then a further 56 days will be given to 'relieve' homelessness.

5.2.2 The Lettings Policy needs to reflect the changes and it is proposed that the following bands will be allocated:-

- Prevention Stage - this is where free advice by the authority is given to prevent homelessness and secure accommodation. Personalised plans are developed and agreed with the individual. The applicant will be assessed in line with the Lettings Policy
- Relief Stage - this is where the individual has been relieved of homelessness by being supported to find alternative, suitable accommodation. The applicant will be placed in Band 3, regardless of whether being placed in temporary accommodation or not
- Anyone who is deemed priority homeless to be given one direct offer, currently they have 4 weeks to bid
- Duty can be discharged at Prevention & Relief Stages
- Full duty in priority need – the applicant will be placed Band 1 or Band 2 depending on their circumstance

Prevention & Relief Stages – if applicant bids for a home and is successful but then refuses the offer, the homelessness duty can be ended. The application will then be re-assessed in line with the Lettings Policy. This offer will be classed as one of the three offers allowed.

## **5.3 Equity**

5.3.1 The Council want to provide a transparent and fair process for assessing whether an applicant has enough funds to meet their own housing need. The following changes are therefore being proposed:-

- Owner Occupiers aged 60+ years – Equity levels to be increased due to market changes - subject to consultation.
- Owner Occupiers aged under 60 years - if an applicant has an annual income of over £50,000 &/or assets worth £100,000 or over.
- Applicants who have purchased their Council home will not be allowed on the housing register for a period of 5 years after the purchase.

## **5.4 Restricting Transfers**

5.4.1 There are 1,060 transfer requests on the housing register of which 550 with no housing need (Bands 5 and 6). During 2017/18, 141 Transfers were housed with no housing need. Transfers can be costly with the average void turnaround approx. £5,000.

5.4.2 The current policy allows any current tenant to apply for a transfer. It is being proposed to:-

- Restrict transfers if there is no housing need and promote mutual exchanges

## **5.5 Responsible Tenants**

5.5.1 Responsible tenants are tenants who have lived in their current home for at least 10 years; they are given an additional priority if they have complied with the Tenancy Agreement. There are currently 379 responsible tenants on the housing register and during 2017/18 only three were re-housed. This shows that only a limited number of tenants are moving and it is not reflective of housing need across the borough. It is being proposed to remove this additional priority.

## **5.6 Accepting Offers and Refusals**

Currently when an applicant has bid and is subsequently made an offer of accommodation, they are given two days to decide if they wish to accept. It is proposed to change this to 24 hours.

The same applies to when an applicant has viewed the property. Currently they are given up to 48 hours to decide if they wish to accept the property; it is proposed to change this to 24 hours.

In addition, if an applicant is at the top of more than one shortlist for a property, it is proposed that an officer will decide on which home to allocate, currently the applicant is given the choice.

This should result in a more efficient and effective way of letting our homes, saving void turnaround times and increasing potential revenue.

5.6.1 Currently when an applicant has refused three offers of suitable accommodation, their application is suspended for a period of three months. This is not proving a deterrent and can lead to extended void times, loss of potential revenue, extra officer time and can delay other people on the waiting list getting much needed accommodation. It is proposed to:-

- To extend the suspension to a period of 12 months before an applicant can bid again.

## **6.0 Background Information**

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report and may be inspected at the offices of the author.

[North Tyneside Council Lettings Policy 2016](#)

[Homelessness Reduction Act 2018](#)