



**Report to the Safer and Stronger
Communities Scrutiny & policy development
Committee
26th March 2015**

Report of: Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods Service

Subject: Progress on Implementation of the Allocations Policy

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Summary:

The Scrutiny Committee has requested a written update on the implementation of the new Allocations Policy.

The new policy was agreed by Cabinet in March 2013 and authority was delegated to the Executive Director for Communities to fully implement the new Allocations Policy once necessary updates to the Choice Based Lettings Information Technology system is completed.

The report sets out an update on progress to date and the revised time line for full implementation which is now expected to be completed by April 2016. This reflects the timescales required by the supplier to make amendments to the system which have significantly increased. A number of provisions that are introduced in the policy will be implemented early prior to the system being amended and the details of these changes are explained in the report.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	√
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note and comment on progress to date

Background Papers:

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Director of Housing And Neighborhoods**Progress on Implementation of the Allocations Policy****1. Introduction/Context**

- 1.1 An update on the progress of the Allocations Policy implementation has been requested by the Scrutiny Committee.

- 1.2 The new Allocations Policy was agreed by Cabinet in April 2013, with an initial commitment to implement the policy by April 2014. Due to delays caused by the necessary changes to the IT system the implementation date for the Allocations Policy was revised to October 2015. However, the IT supplier has now confirmed they will not be able to undertake all necessary work to meet this timescale, and therefore full implementation is now expected to be April 2016. This report outlines the activities undertaken to prepare for the implementation of the new policy to date, sets out the proposed early implementation of provisions that are not dependent on IT, and sets out the reasons for the requirement to delay full implementation.

2. Main body of report, matters for consideration**2.1 Revised Timeline for Full Implementation**

The Allocations Policy relies upon significant changes being made to the Choice Base Lettings (CBL) IT system. The CBL IT system provider indicated that they would be able to complete the work by October 2015. The system supplier, Abris has now received our full specification detailing each of the amendments we require. Abris however are now not able to deliver all of the required modifications until January 2016 due to the volume of other work requests they have outstanding from other customers.

Once this has been completed approximately 400 staff will require training on the new policy, supporting processes and system changes. This means we are not be able to fully implement the Allocations Policy until April 2016

A project board and dedicated project manager are in place to lead the implementation which is proceeding to the revised plan and timeline. However it should be noted that a number of risks remain that could affect the implementation, and these will be closely monitored with remedial action taken where necessary to keep the project on course. This includes co-ordinating activity where possible to run concurrently with the implementation

of the Housing + model which will also involve system changes and staff training in the same timeframe.

To help ensure that there is no further delay, the development of the IT system requirements should be closely managed and incrementally tested. This work has been commissioned through a series of small work orders. This will be delivered to the Council between August 2015 and January 2016.

2.2 **Phased Implementation**

A number of the provisions that are contained within the Allocations Policy can be implemented early as they are not reliant upon IT changes but can be introduced by changing processes. An Individual Cabinet Members Report has been drafted which, if agreed, will allow for these provisions to be implemented by including them in the current Lettings Policy.

2.3 Assuming the ICMR is agreed and we are able to proceed in this way a revised communication plan will be put into place to ensure that customers, staff and councillors are informed of these changes.

2.4 The proposed amendments to the Lettings Policy include:

- Requesting satisfactory identification for people joining Sheffield City Council's Housing register at the point of their registration
- Restricting customers from joining the housing register for a period of two years after being rehoused to social housing
- Preventing people over 25 years of age being included in more than one housing registration
- Allow approved foster carers and adopters, subject to confirmation, access to larger accommodation for which they will be eligible following the placement of a child to their care

2.5 **Review of Age Designation**

Our current Lettings Policy provides for three age designations for all our flats and bungalow accommodation. This means that we will try to let these to people over the minimum age limit set for those properties. The current age designations are:

- Over 60
- Over 40
- General Needs – normally over 18

The new Allocations Policy includes a change to these categories and provides for just two age designations, which are over 60 or general needs.

We have reviewed those properties in the current 40+ category and made proposals to move them into the general needs or over 60 categories before the new policy is introduced. The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee also asked us to undertake a comprehensive review of all age designated properties to ensure that these were still fit for purpose and represented the best use of Council stock. The review of age designated accommodation has combined both these requirements.

This review has now been completed and proposals have been submitted to the Director of Housing for authorisation. Based on an analysis of demand and considering all feedback received, this has identified a number of properties where the age designation should remain unchanged, and others where there is no or low demand for age designated properties. Re-designation will free up housing for other customers who are in housing need and cannot currently access these properties.

Once the proposed changes have been authorised ward meetings with Cabinet Members will be arranged to inform them of the decisions prior to affected customers being informed. All affected residents will be written to advising them of any changes. It is not anticipated that there will be any immediate impacts of changes as the profile of tenants will only change potentially as properties fall vacant. However, it has been agreed that tenants in any blocks of flats that are currently designated for over 60s that are re-designated as general needs, will be offered a priority to move to another 60+ property.

2.6 Proposed Timetable

A revised project plan has been produced which reflects the delay to the IT systems changes. The implementation timeline has been scoped and planned based on the revised full implementation date of April 2016:

- Phase 1 implementation of Allocations Policy introduced from May 2015
- Consider a possible second phase of none IT dependant policy implementation in the Autumn of 2015
- Abris to deliver our IT requirements between August 2015 and January 2016 via a detailed timeline programme
- All IT modifications will require testing, each proposed to last between 5 and 10 days. This will take place between August 2015 and January 2016
- Training plans and scripts need to be developed and delivered. This will take place between August 2015 and January 2016
- To reassess all applicants and allocate to the correct new band is a much more intensive task than originally envisaged and will take approximately 3 months. This will take place between January and March 2016
- Staff to be trained on system changes Feb-March 2016

3.0 Financial Implications

£50,000 has been spent on project team costs over the period April 2014 to March 2015 from the project budget. There is a current underspend across the project budget due to slippage in timescales for implementation. The surplus budget will need to be carried forward to fund ongoing work for the period April 2015 to March 2016 due to the revised timetable.

The budget for the project will be reviewed and adjusted due to an increase in the cost of IT changes from the estimated £60,000 to £84,000 and the increase in staffing costs to extend the implementation team until the new implementation date of April 2016.

3.1 Summary of estimated costs

Activity	Cost
Advertising and communications	£40,409
Support for customers at 'go live'	£36,168
Abritas and IT changes (estimated)	£60,000
Project team staffing	£108,528
Documentation scanning	£3,600
Re assessment of applicants	£27,300
Sub total	£276,005
Contingency	£55,201
Total	£331,206

The contingency is in place to account for the following:

- Unknown IT system change costs
- Any additional customer support, communications or advertising that may be required
- Any other unforeseen cost, this has already included additional IT costs

4 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

4.1 Impact of the New Policy for Housing Applicants

	Issue	Impact for Customers	Implementation Date
1	Age Designation	More options for younger applicants where properties are re-designated as general needs. Customers in 60+ blocks offered priority to move if wish to do so.	May 2015
2	Identification required	Customers to provide ID at the point of registration in order for application	May 2015

		validation to take place. This will help to reduce the risk of fraud.	
3	Two year restriction	Once rehoused under Choice Based Lettings customers cannot reapply to join the register for two years. This will help to reduce turnover so help to reduce rent losses caused by vacancies, and contribute to tenancy sustainment.	May 2015
4	Multiple applications	Customers aged over twenty five can only be registered on one application. This will help to ensure fairness in the allocation of properties and reduce duplication of work in administering the system.	May 2015
5	Children and Young People	By providing routes into suitable council housing for families who are approved foster carers and adoptive parents this will support successful outcomes for vulnerable children.	May 2015
6	Priority Banding	Assessed for one of three priority bands so more urgent housing need leads to quicker rehousing. This will contribute to supporting independent living and prevent more expensive residential care and delays in hospital discharges.	April 2016
7	Registration	Required to provide references, and keep their registration updated annually. Customers with poor tenancy history may be unable to register or have reduced preference in certain circumstances. We will be better able to identify customers who if awarded a tenancy may need targeted support. This will improve tenancy sustainment and help to reduce anti-social behaviour and rent arrears for example. An up-to date register will make it easier to administer the system, assess housing need and plan for provision.	April 2016

Implementation of the policy changes later than originally anticipated may mean that further policy changes will need to be made as a result of changes in statutory guidance or legislation or the local housing market. It is proposed to establish a mechanism for a standing review of the policy so that it is reviewed on a more regular basis and updated more swiftly in response to external influences. Delays to the implementation may mean that some of the expected benefits of implementing the policy will not be achieved as quickly as originally expected. The Equality Impact Assessment for the project is

being revised to take account of this. Lessons learned are being collated and will be reflected in future work on managing the policy and any changes.

5. Recommendation

- 5.2 The Committee is asked to note the progress made so far and comment on the progress to date

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