

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 9 October, 2017

Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Building Services

Minor updates to the Homes4U Housing Allocation Policy

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Cabinet of the results of the public consultation undertaken on the draft Homes4U Housing Allocation Policy and to seek approval for the changes required.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet note the contents of this report and endorse the responses to the representations made on the draft Homes4U Housing & Allocation Policy attached at [Appendix 1](#) of this report.
2. That Cabinet approve the finalised Homes4U Housing & Allocation Policy attached at [Appendix 2](#) of this report.

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. To provide a summary of the public consultation undertaken on the draft Homes4U Housing & Allocation Policy and to seek Member's endorsement of the responses and changes proposed to the finalised Policy.
2. To ensure the Policy is compliant with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Background

2. This report contains the following appendices which are attached electronically. In addition copies are available in the Members room.
[Appendix 1](#) - Summary of Consultation Representations and Council's response.
[Appendix 2](#) - Final Homes4U Housing & Allocations Policy.
3. The Council's Homes4U Housing & Allocation Policy was last formerly reviewed in full in 2011 with only minor changes made since that date. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 however brought a number of amendments to the legislative framework for housing allocations, which required the Council to review the Homes4U Policy to ensure it was compliant with the new Act.

Relevant Issues and Options

4. Any member of the public can apply to go on to the housing register and once their housing circumstances are assessed they are placed into one of a number of bands and are able to bid for properties. The scheme operates through a Common Housing Register and a Common Allocation Policy. This means applicants only have to apply to join one list and all Council and Registered Housing Association homes are allocated by the same rules.
5. A Member's seminar was held on 27th April 2016 to obtain feedback on what they would like to change if there was a review of the Policy. Members confirmed that the policy should be updated to reflect the legislative changes, feedback from the Homes4U users and registered housing association partners though it was noted that the existing policy was working well.
6. A formal 28 day public consultation exercise took place between 5th June 2017 & 4th July 2017. Officers considered the responses received resulting in the finalised version for adoption (see Appendix 1&2). This report therefore summarises the results of the public consultation undertaken and seeks the adoption of the finalised Homes4U Policy to ensure the policy remains legally compliant and meets the demands of the Council, its stock, Homes4U applicants and the scheme's four Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners.
7. Our RSL partners and relevant Council departments commented on the draft Policy as well as seventeen individuals. The consultation was promoted through the Council's social media channels, twitter, and was seen by over 6,000 people on Facebook.
8. As these are only minor changes to the policy, they are not required to be approved by Full Council.
9. The minor changes made to the policy as a result of the introduction of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, including the amendments arising from the consultation exercise as follows;
 - All new homelessness duties recognised and reflected within the current banding structure of the policy.
 - Armed Forces personnel including Reservists and their families to be awarded additional preference in recognition of their services to the Country.
 - Foster Carers now recognised as a priority category.
 - Overcrowding criteria clarified.
 - Under-Occupancy category now included.
 - Shared Accommodation included as a housing option.
 - Applicants with former housing debts now required to seek support to reduce debts to enable the allocation of accommodation through the scheme.
 - Applicants residing in temporary Supported Accommodation resources including Domestic Abuse Refuges (not restricted to the Vale of Glamorgan) to be awarded additional preference in recognition of the need for appropriate and timely 'move-on' to a permanent home.
10. The full comments and responses to the consultation are provided at Appendix 1.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

11. The preparation of the updated Homes4U Policy has been undertaken by officers within the Housing Services Directorate and within existing budgets. The adoption of the Policy is not anticipated to result in additional expenditure.
12. There are no staffing or other resource implications from this report. The previous Homes4U Policy has been updated with only minor changes in the banding structure and the IT implications can be dealt with within the existing budgets and staff resource.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

13. The ability to successfully manage the social housing provision across the Vale of Glamorgan will assist in the creation of sustainable, balanced and inclusive communities, ensuring accommodation is allocated based upon need and other community and environmental factors, if appropriate.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

14. The Council's Housing Allocation Policy has been previously developed in accordance with Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996; the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities; Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness (Welsh Government 2015) and the Regulatory Framework for Housing Associations Registered in Wales (Welsh Government, 2011).
15. The Policy now needs to be amended to ensure it reflects the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 as well as the Allocation of Housing & Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations 2014 and any new Codes of Guidance issued by Welsh Government.
16. The Council has a legal duty to keep and publish its housing allocation policy and to keep the policy under review in order to reflect the changes and amendments in legislation, case law; and local priorities.

Crime and Disorder Implications

17. The social housing allocation scheme will protect and support very vulnerable clients who are likely to be more susceptible to experiencing crime and disorder difficulties through providing stable and appropriate homes.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

18. The development of an updated Homes4U Policy is supportive of the Council's Equal Opportunities ethos as it identifies the mechanisms needed for clients to access a suitable and stable home in the Vale of Glamorgan. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed on the updated Policy
19. All literature has been made available in Welsh Language during the consultation process and the finalised Homes4U Policy will be made available in English and Welsh as the Council's Website once approved

Corporate/Service Objectives

20. This report is consistent with the Corporate Plan, Wellbeing Outcome 1: An Inclusive and Safe Vale, Objective 2: Providing decent homes and safe communities.

21. This report is also consistent with the Council's Local Housing Strategy 2015-20 which aims to ensure that 'Vale of Glamorgan residents have access to affordable, good quality sustainable housing and housing advice and support'

Policy Framework and Budget

22. This report is a matter of Executive decision by Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

23. A working group was established, made up of officers from the Council, and the Homes4U Partners to consider the options for updating the Homes4U Policy.
24. A seminar for Members was held on 27th April 2016 to gain views on some of the issues members felt were important to reflect in the scheme. Feedback was that;
- The scheme was working well and should be updated rather than undergo a fundamental review
 - It should be updated to reflect the changes in legislation and operational feedback from users and Homes4U partners and stakeholders.
 - It should continue to reflect the local lettings policies in the rural communities.
25. The formal consultation period where Members, applicants and the wider public were invited to comment on the proposed changes expired on 5 July 2017. The Policy was placed on the Council's website between Monday 5th June and Tuesday 4th July 2017.
26. The Draft Policy and associated survey were also promoted through the Council's social media channels, Facebook and Twitter as previously advised, the post was seen by over 6,000 people on Facebook.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

27. Homes & Safe Communities

Background Papers

None.

Contact Officer

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Officers Consulted

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