

**REPORT TO: HOUSING, DUNDEE CONTRACT SERVICES AND
ENVIROMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE - 25 JANUARY 2010**

REPORT ON: AMENDMENTS TO THE COUNCIL'S LETTING POLICY

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

REPORT NO: 18-2010

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. This report recommends a number of changes which should be made to the council's letting policy as a result of comments from the Scottish Housing Regulator and from improvements which have been highlighted through best practice.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. It is recommended that Committee agree the following changes to the council's letting policy:
- 2.1.1. A change to the policy on sex separation to allow sharing a bedroom for children of different sexes up to the age of eight years.
- 2.1.2. Applicants who are re-housed by another landlord will be asked if they would like their application to be reviewed or to be cancelled.
- 2.1.3. Personnel serving in Her Majesty's Armed Forces will be considered for housing up to nine months prior to discharge.
- 2.1.4. Prisoners serving custodial sentences may be considered for Housing up to six months prior to release.
- 2.1.5. The award of points for overcrowding is changed to be 40 points where one additional bedroom is required and 70 points where two or more additional bedrooms are required.
- 2.1.6. Applicants with social needs are to receive a single award of 40 points where there is an assessed need and that this category is reviewed one year after the Letting I.T. system is commissioned to see if further changes need to be made.
- 2.1.7. Where appropriate, Social Need points are also to be awarded where child protection is an issue.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. None.

4. **BACKGROUND**

- 4.1. The Scottish Housing Regulator produced its report on Housing Services in the Council in March 2009. Though the new letting policy generally received a clean bill of health, there were a few issues where it was recommended that the council reviewed its approach. These were:
- Its approach to cancellations is not consistent and fails to take account of individual circumstances (Para 4.13).
 - Suspension for 6 months after 3 offers is restrictive (Para 4.14).
 - Choice is limited by sex separation policy (Para 4.25).
 - The policy on sex separation of children currently prevents children of different sexes from sharing a bedroom regardless of age. In some circumstances this can result in families being forced to await availability of a three bedroom or larger property which are in very short supply. It is recommended that the policy will be amended to allow sharing a bedroom for children of different sexes up to the age of eight years. This will bring the Council's policy in line with those of local Housing Associations.
- 4.2. Applicants who are re-housed by other landlords (either private landlords or housing associations) currently have their applications cancelled. It is recommended that the Policy is amended so that applicants will be asked if they would like their application to be reviewed or to be cancelled.
- 4.3. Though the SHR considered that the policy of cancellation after 3 offers is restrictive it is considered that new working practices which will be embedded in the new Letting IT system will ensure that inappropriate offers are rarely made. It is therefore recommended that the current policy stands but that the position is reviewed to ascertain how many applicants have been cancelled after six months operation of the new Letting IT system. The new Letting IT system will go live in February, 2010.
- 4.4. Some additional changes are suggested to the letting policy to accommodate new government guidance and best practice. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.
- 4.5. Government Guidance which was issued early in 2009 regarding housing for Personnel serving in Her Majesty's Armed Forces suggests that they should be considered for housing up to six months prior to discharge. The existing policy activates applications up to three months prior to discharge. It is proposed that the policy is amended to allow consideration of applications up to nine months prior to discharge.
- 4.6. It is recommended that to aid the prevention of homelessness and meet ministerial homeless targets for 2012, prisoners serving custodial sentences may be considered for housing up to six months prior to release as opposed to the current three months.
- 4.7. The award of points for overcrowding is currently 20 points where one bedroom is required, 40 points where two additional bedrooms are required and 70 points where more than two bedrooms are required. It has been found that there are relatively large numbers of applicants who are overcrowded and who require one additional bedroom whereas very few require more than two bedrooms. To balance these needs it is recommended that the award of points is changed to be 40 points where one additional bedroom is required and 70 points where two or more additional bedrooms are required.

- 4.8. Applicants with social needs are currently awarded either 20 or 40 points. We have encountered some difficulty in finding an assessment method that fairly distinguishes different levels of need owing to the diverse range of needs which this category covers. It is recommended that this is changed to be a single award of 40 points where there is an assessed need. It is further recommended that this category is reviewed one year after the Letting I.T. system is commissioned to see if further changes need to be made.
- 4.9. A number of requests have been received from the Social Work Department for additional points to be given where there is a requirement to assist a move for child protection purposes. Where there is an immediate need to remove a child from a potential harm, emergency housing can be arranged. Otherwise additional points can be given to assist a move using the Social Points award.

5. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management. There are no major issues.

6. **CONSULTATIONS**

- 6.1. The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Assistant Chief Executive, Director of Finance and all other Chief Officers have been consulted in the preparation of this report. No concerns have been expressed.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1. Allocations Policy [Report No. 605-2006]
<http://www.dundee.gov.uk/reports/reports/605-2006.pdf>

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10 DECEMBER 2009