

Policy Advisory Group

23 March 2016

Report to Cabinet

Purpose of the Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to consider and explore potential opportunities to amend Gateshead Council's lettings policy, with a view to increasing the sustainability of tenancies and making Council housing easier to access for potential appropriate new customers.

Summary of Advice:

Demoted Applicants

Agree that in order to be allowed to bid, demoted applicants must demonstrate that they have attempted to make repayments to reduce arrears (or modify behaviour if demoted through ASB)

Welcome the discussions which take place with tenants if a tenancy is to be moved from demoted to suspended to understand any mitigating circumstances and provide support where necessary

Undertaking financial assessments is key where it is evident a person may not be able to sustain their tenancy

Welcome the opportunity for officers to be able to use their discretion when considering individual cases

Need to ensure that 'discretion' does not lead to additional levels of bureaucracy

Look to include within the policy what is deemed as acceptable behaviour for a tenancy to help to address incidents relating to ASB

Eligibility for Transfers

Agree that unless there is a significant housing need, tenants should remain in their homes for a period of twelve months before they can register for a transfer of property

Agree that where a request for a transfer is received, a tenant's home is inspected to ensure that it is to a lettable standard

Need to take into consideration the wider interest of the area if a person does not move

Would like to promote more widely the opportunity for mutual exchange of properties

Children in Flats

Some councillors receive complaints from tenants in relation to noise where there are children residing in flats

Do not think that children under the aged of 16 years should reside in the large multi storey flats

The upper age of 16 years is too high

Children reside in flats in other countries and this is acceptable

In a situation where we have vacant properties it is better to give people the choice if they have children as to whether or not they wish to reside in a flat

There should be more mixed age communities to create more community support networks

Would like to see mixed age communities but this does not always work

Should the policy for children in flats change, the 25 families that currently have a priority award should have their award protected, but there should be no further awards to new tenants

Pets in Flats

(this is an issue within the tenancy agreement and comments will be fed in to any forthcoming reviews)

There is a need to determine what type of pet and the number of pets which would be allowed

Recognise the benefits that pets bring to some people but the number of pets could be limited

Pets should not be allowed where there are communal entrances to properties

Recognise problems if there are pets and there are communal entrances but are there opportunities where this could be relaxed

Need to look at how pets are managed by tenants

Look at good practice elsewhere

Age Restrictions

Agree that the age limit for two bedroom bungalows should not change

Recognise where age limits have been lowered previously this has had little impact on being able to let specific properties

Recognise that some schemes may need to be re-registered if age limits are lowered (where previously older persons sheltered accommodation where a warden is on site) and the wider impacts this may have

Suggested that where an age limit is lowered, the policy include that OAP's would get a higher priority for the property

Suggested that if a property is advertised and cannot be re-let then the possible reduction of age limit be looked at, taking into account any potential impacts

Affordability

Agree that a financial assessment be undertake and that officers reserve the right to refuse an offer if the assessment demonstrates that the tenant would not be able financially to sustain the tenancy

Welcome the work that would be undertaken by officers to help people to bid on properties that would not place them in financial hardship

Downsizing

Agree that there should just be one scheme for downsizing and priority given to those moving into smaller properties that are in lower demand

Where people are registered under the existing downsizing scheme as a result of Welfare Reform, their current award should be honoured but there should be no new awards given.

Foster Carers

Recognise that where a person wishes to foster, they must have appropriate accommodation to do so

Concerns that some foster placements may be short term.

Would fixed term tenancies be acceptable?

Welcome the work which currently takes place with social workers and fostering team to look at each case on an individual basis

The Council encourage families to foster and the steps which officers are currently taking for accommodation requests are reasonable

The policy should include that the Council recognise that fostering is a priority and that each case for housing would be looked at on an individual basis

Chair: J Turnbull

Members Present: Councillors L Caffrey, B Goldsworthy, M Graham, M Hood, J Lee, P Mole and L Twist

Officers Present: Lisa Philliskirk –Housing Services Manager
Kevin Johnson – Head of Customer Services, TGHC
Jackie Armstrong – Customer Services Manager TGHC
Karen Robson - Corporate Services and Governance