

## Common Housing Allocations Policy - Consultation Report

Angus Council and our Common Housing Register partners (Hillcrest Housing Association Ltd; Caledonia Housing Association Ltd; and Blackwood Homes) have now completed the consultation around the changes we are proposing to make to our Common Housing Allocations Policy.

The consultation took place over 5 weeks from 7 December 2016 to 11 January 2017 and included an online public survey, focus groups involving staff, partner agencies and tenants and individual discussions and meetings with tenants and applicants.

The online survey had 72 responses – a summary of the responses can be accessed here (*insert link to summary of responses*). Responses overall were positive and in favour of the introduction of a choice based lettings approach and supportive of the proposed changes to the suspension criteria and priority bandings.

Feedback and comments from the survey, consultations events, meetings and individual discussions have been collated and grouped into the following areas:

### Proposed Common Allocations Policy (CAP)

#### Comments

- How is this going to affect current applications?
- Reference to housing options, should this be in the CAP?
- Listing the legislation makes it seem complicated
- Make sure all contact details are clear in policy
- Unclear what 'bidding means'
- Policy is too long
- Difficult to understand what you mean by starters / movers
- Difficult to find starters / movers section
- Easier to understand than current policy
- Is more clear and transparent
- Need to be clearer re timescales for suspension reasons (eviction / abandonment)
- Will the suspension criteria apply to everyone on the application or just the main applicant(s)?
- Do we need to send a review reminder?
- What about public protection, preventing people from bidding on certain areas if they may be a risk to others, how will this be managed?
- What is considered a 'reasonable offer'?

#### Response

Issue	Response
<b>Current applications</b>	Applications will be automatically reassessed as per new policy when launched and applicants will be notified of any changes to their application
<b>Policy needs to be customer friendly and terms fully explained</b>	Update policy to make these areas clearer  Liaise with Communication department to design 'user friendly' final draft  Produce Summary leaflet and FAQs document to go

	alongside policy
<b>Suspension criteria</b>	Policy needs to be clear who this applies to and timescales
	Clarify in policy what is considered a 'reasonable offer' of housing
<b>Review reminder letters</b>	Policy needs to be updated
	Review letter needs updated on committee approval to notify existing applicants of upcoming changes
<b>Bypassing</b>	Add section re bypassing in policy
<b>Housing Options</b>	Update policy to make it clear how it links with housing options and the prevention of homeless

## Online Bidding & Support for Applicants

### Comments

- What options will be available for applicants who don't have access to the internet?
- How will people living in rural areas be supported to bid?
- How do we identify and support vulnerable applicants to bid?
- How many bids can an applicant make at any one time?
- What happens to applicants who do not make bids?
- Will unsuccessful bidders be notified?
- Will applicants be able to see where they were ranked compared to other bids made?
- Will applicants be able to withdraw a bid after it has been made?
- Will applicants with particular housing needs be prevented from bidding on unsuitable properties?
- Can applicants nominate someone to bid on their behalf?
- Essential to monitor bids to understand areas of high demand

### Response

Issue	Response
<b>Identifying vulnerable applicants</b>	<p>Ensure application form can identify any vulnerable applicants</p> <p>Close monitoring of bids to ensure non bidders can be contacted and support offered</p> <p>Good partnership working and awareness raising of the policy with other agencies</p>
<b>Support for applicants who do not have access to the internet</b>	<p>Provide training to ACCESS staff (ACCESS Line and libraries)</p> <p>Telephone bidding service via ACCESS Line for applicants who need it</p> <p>Ensure operational guidance includes engagement with existing agencies if support already in place</p>

	Ensure operational guidance allows for applicants to nominate someone to bid on their behalf
<b>Supporting applicants to understand the bidding system</b>	Awareness raising / IT sessions Ensure system / bidding site is user friendly Provide instruction manual alongside bidding system
<b>Bidding system – preventing unsuitable bids; withdrawing bids; notifying unsuccessful bidders; limit number of current bids per applicants; non bidders</b>	To be agreed and included in bidding system specification, user instructions and operational guidelines
<b>Monitoring of bids</b>	Ensure comprehensive reports are set up to allow officers to monitor bids and manage applications effectively

## Advertising Properties

### Comments

- Need to extend advertising beyond the website only
- At what stage will the property be advertised after leaving tenant hands in their notice?
- Need to make adverts as detailed as possible and meet all legal requirements for advertising properties
- How to we manage properties that need a sensitive allocation?
- No need to re advertise property after 3 refusals, offer to next bidder on list

### Response

Issue	Response
<b>Restricting to online advertising</b>	Explore possibility of text / email notifications in specification for IT system  Explore ACCESS Offices / libraries displaying available properties
<b>Information included on advert</b>	Ensure IT system is set up so adverts contain all relevant information about the property, including pictures, and includes links to google maps, local services and amenities
<b>At what stage the property is advertised</b>	To be clear in operational guidance
<b>Sensitive lets / local lettings initiatives</b>	Advertising criteria and any restrictions re sensitive lets to be made clearer in policy  Applying advertising criteria and restrictions to be detailed in operational guidance
<b>Re-advertising properties</b>	Update policy and include potential for multiple viewings for difficult to let properties

## **Next Steps**

The council and partners will work on a final version of the Common Housing Allocations Policy which will be informed by the views expressed through the consultation.

The relevant boards and Committees will consider the final draft of the Common Housing Allocations Policy and decide whether to approve and adopt the policy.

If the revised policy is approved, the council and its partners will then put in place the relevant actions and changes needed to adopt the policy including new systems and procedures. If adopted, the council and partners will work towards implementing the revised Common Housing Allocations Policy by Summer 2018.