

SCRUTINY BOARD

Agenda Item: 6

Ward: All
Portfolio: Nigel
 Woollcombe-Adams
Date: 12 July 2016

Report Author:
 Jai Vick & Debbie Lambert - Housing Options Team

Subject: Proposed Changes following Review of Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy

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Report Sign off	Seen by:	Name	Date
	Legal	Alex Kershaw-Moore	28.06.16
	Finance	N/A	
	Procurement	N/A	
	Corporate Manager	Tracy Aarons	28.06.16
	Portfolio Holder	Nigel Woollcombe-Adams	28.06.16
	Ward Member(s)	N/A	
Summary:	<p>Due to Countywide timescales, we were unable to present to Scrutiny prior to Cabinet. The five Local Authorities need to commission changes by mid July.</p> <p>THIS PAPER IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY as the proposed changes following Review of the Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy were agreed by Cabinet on 11 July 2016.</p> <p>The appendices of this report can be provided on request.</p> <p>The Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board has reviewed the Homefinder Common Allocations policy in the light of ongoing changes to welfare payments and also in changes to the way in which applicants express an interest on properties. The review has taken account of issues raised by Local Authorities and Landlord Partners when administering and applying the Policy. The updated draft policy has been reviewed in detail by Local Authority and Registered Providers (Housing Association and Council Landlords) and has been the subject of a consultation exercise with applicants and stakeholders.</p> <p>Over 1100 applicants responded to the consultation exercise with all proposed changes being supported.</p> <p>The summary of the proposed key policy changes and the reasoning behind each change is provided in the background papers. At Appendix 2 (available on request).</p>		

	The Policy Consultation feedback report is provided in the background papers. See Appendix 3 (available on request).
Recommendation:	The Homefinder Somerset Monitoring Board (of which Mendip District Council is a board member) has considered the consultation feedback in detail and has recommended that the proposed changes to the Homefinder Allocations policy be adopted by the five District and Borough Councils.
Direct and/or indirect impact on service delivery to our customers and communities:	Approving the policy changes will assist in the delivery of the Corporate Priority – Taking all possible steps to support the provision of housing in the District.
Impact on Service Plans:	N/A
Financial Implications:	<p>There will be a small revenue implication in terms of minor works to the Homefinder IT system. This cost will be borne by the Homefinder Somerset Partnership.</p> <p>There will be resources required to implement the changes in terms of Officer time which will be required to re assess applicants to ensure correct bands are awarded. This will be administered internally with no additional cost to the Local Authority.</p>
Legal Implications:	Under the Housing Act 1996, Mendip District Council must have an allocation scheme which they must follow when deciding the priorities and procedures for allocating housing. The Scheme must meet certain requirements laid down in the Act. Failure to review the Homefinder Somerset policy would breach the Council's statutory duty under the Housing Act 1996 and leave the council open to legal challenge.
Crime and Disorder Implications:	N/A
Equalities Implications:	An Equalities Analysis has been carried out and be will published alongside the Homefinder Somerset policy – Appendix 4 (available on request).

<p>Risk Assessment and Adverse Impact on Corporate Actions:</p>	<p>Failure to review the Homefinder Somerset Allocations policy would breach the Council's statutory duty under the Housing Act 1996 to review its housing policy and to ensure that the policy takes into consideration changes in legislation and best practice.</p> <p>The risk to accepting the proposed changes are very minimal as all of the proposed changes were supported following a consultation exercise with the Local Authorities and Registered Providers who operate Homefinder, applicants and stakeholders.</p> <p>The risk implications of not accepting the proposed changes would mean that Mendip District Council could then be excluded from the Homefinder Somerset partnership and due to significant cost implications, would not be in a position to operate its own housing allocations system</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The Council introduced Choice Based Lettings across Somerset in 2008 as a Countywide scheme, Homefinder Somerset. Choice Based Lettings schemes were designed to introduce an element of choice for people who apply for social housing. Choice Based Lettings allow people applying for a home, (including existing social housing tenants who want to transfer) to express an interest on properties which become available through Homefinder Somerset.

During 2010 a review group made up of the Somerset Local Authorities undertook a review of the Homefinder Somerset scheme. The review recommended some amendments to the policy, the application form and the system that is used to assess housing register applications and operate the Choice Based Lettings allocations process.

As a result of recent changes in allocations legislation and the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, a further review of the Homefinder Somerset Allocations policy was reviewed and changes to the policy were made and approved by Cabinet 2013.

In light of welfare reform and issues raised by customers, Registered Providers and the Local Authorities, Homefinder Monitoring board asked the Homefinder Operational Staff to review the policy again in 2016. That review led to the proposals for changes in the policy which are set out in Appendix 2 (available on request).

RECOMMENDATION

That Members approve and adopt the revised Countywide Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy.

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Background Papers

Homefinder Somerset Allocation Policy July 2016 – Appendix 1
HFS Policy Changes Report for LA members – Summary of key policy changes - Appendix 2
Homefinder Somerset Consultation Responses – Appendix 3
Equality Analysis Form July 2016 - Appendix 4