

**SUBMISSION BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE
HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY AND TENANCY STRATEGY MEMBER TASK GROUP**

HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY AND TENANCY STRATEGY

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the work of the Task Group since the last meeting of the Community, Housing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19th March 2012.
- 1.2 To give Members of the full Committee an opportunity to comment on the adopted Tenancy Strategy and refer these to the Cabinet Member - Health, Housing and Environmental Protection for his consideration.

2. PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1 A third meeting of the Task Group took place on 27th April 2012 which was attended by three Members of the Committee to specifically consider the draft Tenancy Strategy.
- 2.2 The Tenancy Strategy provides guidance for Registered Providers (RPs) of social housing in Lichfield District when developing their Tenancy Policies for delivering and letting accommodation.
- 2.3 The Group was informed that the Localism Act 2011 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy. The Group were also advised of recent government reforms that have given RPs greater freedoms that will allow them to:
 - Grant new tenants a fixed-term tenancy if it is felt to be more appropriate than the offer of a lifetime tenancy.
 - Determine the length of the fixed-term offered to each tenant on an individual basis
 - Build new homes and re-let existing homes under the new 'affordable rent' tenure, which enables housing providers to charge up to 80% of the market rent for a comparable property.
 - Develop their own Tenancy Policy setting out the criteria to be used when granting new tenancies and in determining whether or not to reissue a new tenancy at the end of a fixed-term
- 2.4 RPs must 'have regard to' the District Council's Tenancy Strategy in formulating their own Tenancy Policies and many already have plans and policies in place which will help them to fulfil their contractual obligations to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) over the development of new affordable rented housing until 2015.
- 2.5 The Group considered in detail the draft Tenancy Strategy and in particular looked at the following guidance it contains for RP's on-
 - The expected rent levels of any new 'affordable rent' tenancies they want to grant
 - What kind of tenancies they grant

- The circumstances in which they will grant a tenancy of a particular kind
 - Where they grant tenancies for a certain term, the lengths of terms
 - The circumstances where they will grant a further tenancy on the ending of the existing tenancy
- 2.6 The Panel was in broad agreement with the principles adopted in the Strategy. With regards to the new affordable rent levels Members agreed with the principle in the Tenancy Strategy that social housing rent levels in the district should remain truly affordable; market rents can vary considerably and new affordable rents should not significantly differ in this way.
- 2.7 Members also agreed with the principle that rents should remain affordable for low income and working households and should not be a disincentive to work or make households dependant on welfare benefits.
- 2.7 The Panel considered consultation responses on the draft strategy that had been received from RPs operating in the District. Members were advised that there was broad compatibility with the main RP tenancy policies and all RPs have been asked to review their own tenancy policies to ensure that they complement our Tenancy Strategy.
- 2.8 After considering the draft strategy in full Members requested some minor changes. These included adding in a link to a definition of affordable housing; revising considerations on under occupancy to be on a case by case basis; placing a greater emphasis on an RPs role in providing housing options and liaising with the Council on this and also including more information about the Council's work with the private rented sector.
- 2.9 Owing to the timescales to secure approval for the Tenancy Strategy by Cabinet, it was not possible to seek comments from the full Community, Housing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that this will be undertaken at the June meeting of the Committee. The Member Panel recommended the Tenancy Strategy with their amendments to the Cabinet Member for approval at Cabinet. However, as this is an area of emerging policy, the Panel suggested that the Strategy should be reviewed in 12 months time. The Tenancy Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 15th May and the Cabinet Member, in consultation with the Director, was authorised to review and amend the Strategy as may be required from time to time. The approved Strategy is attached as **Appendix 1**.
- 2.10 Members were also given an update on the allocation policy and advised that the UChoose partnership have discussed how any impending amendments to allocation policies should be carried out, however this will be dependent on the outcome of options appraisals for the future delivery of UChoose which are not likely to be completed until September 2012. Once these discussions are concluded a further meeting of the Member Panel will be held to consider any necessary revisions to the housing allocations policy.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Members note the work of the Member Task Group and endorse the recommendations made to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Environmental Protection.
- 3.2 That any further comments made by the Committee are passed to the Cabinet Member for his consideration.
- 3.3 That Members note that the Tenancy Strategy will be reviewed in 12 months time.