

**Report of Chief Officer, Housing Management**

**Report to Director, Resources and Housing**

**Date: 6 June 2017**

**Subject: Extension of Local Lettings Policy for relets of new build homes in Beeston Hill and Holbeck and Little London PFI, Bramley, East End Park, Gipton and Swarcliffe**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Beeston and Holbeck, Bramley, Burmantofts and Richmond Hill, City and Hunslet, Cross Gates and Whinmoor, Gipton and Harehills and Hyde Park and Woodhouse		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

**Summary of main issues**

1. This report proposes to extend the existing local lettings policies for the relets of new build council homes that were developed through the Beeston Hill and Holbeck and Little London PFI scheme and Council House Growth Programme.
2. The initial allocations of new homes gave preference to tenants and residents with excellent tenancy records and a local connection to the area.
3. The local lettings policies used in the initial phases have now expired, and Housing Leeds wishes to extend them for any relets. This report provides an update of the initial lettings and sets out existing local lettings policies for extension.

**Recommendations**

4. That the Chief Officer for Housing Management approves the extension of the local lettings policies for relets of the new build homes listed in section 2.3 until 31 March 2018.

## 1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to extend the original local lettings policies for the re-let of new build council homes to deliver sustainable lettings and support community cohesion.

## 2 Background information

- 2.1 In June 2014 Executive Board approved an overarching approach to allocations of new build homes being delivered through the PFI initiative in Beeston Hill, Holbeck and Little London and the Council House Growth Programme. This has resulted in a number of bespoke local lettings plans tailored to the individual schemes depending on the location and property mix.
- 2.2 All 388 of the new build PFI properties have now been let as well as new build homes delivered through the Council House Growth Programme.
- 2.3 The properties are shown below along with details of when the existing local lettings policies were approved and are due to expire:

<b>Addresses</b>	<b>Ward area</b>	<b>Property types</b>	<b>Date LLP approved</b>	<b>Date LLP expired</b>
Folly Lane, Coupland Place, Malvern Road, Coupland Road, St Luke's Green	Beeston and Holbeck / City and Hunslet	Flats and houses	30 June 2014	31 December 2015
Beech Avenue and Beech Grove	Gipton and Harehills	Houses	25 September 2014	31 December 2015
Carlton Gate	Hyde Park and Woodhouse	Flats and houses	28 November 2014	31 December 2016
Holbeck Moor Road, Temple Garth, Murray Crescent, Jenkinson Close, Jenkinson Lawn, Jenkinson Close	Beeston and Holbeck / City and Hunslet	Flats and houses	10 March 2015	31 December 2016
Railway Close	Burmantofts and Richmond Hill	Flats	27 July 2015	31 December 2016
The Plantation	Cross Gates and Whinmoor	Flats for 55+	25 February 2016	31 December 2016

The following local lettings plans are still current, and due to expire at the end of 2017:

<b>Addresses</b>	<b>Ward area</b>	<b>Property types</b>	<b>Date LLP approved</b>	<b>Date LLP expires</b>
Bismarck Street, Bismarck Way,	Beeston and Holbeck / City	Flats and houses	3 February 2016	31 December 2017

Bismarck Drive, Cemetery Road, Fairfax Crescent	and Hunslet			
Cardigan Green	Bramley	Houses	14 June 2016	31 December 2017

### 3 Main issues

- 3.1 The local lettings policies are based on the principle of rewarding existing council tenants with an excellent tenancy record, a local connection to the ward area based on residence, employment or immediate family and successfully having a home visit. Additional options have been incorporated depending on the particular scheme, for example, employment, under occupation, overcrowding, households with dependent children under 18 years old living in high rise accommodation, Armed Forces personnel, and where the property design permits, a number of homes have been matched to customers requiring adaptations or older customers.
- 3.2 In developing the original proposals, consultation with local tenants and residents showed high levels of support for these preference groups, particularly the requirement to have a good tenancy record and local connection. In aiming to meet local needs and aspirations some of the local lettings policies have been complex and ongoing evaluation of lettings outcomes has resulted in changes to the original approach, for example, the policies in Beeston Hill and Holbeck and Little London PFI area changed over time in response to feedback about the initial lettings.
- 3.3 The lettings process has been resource intensive but was supported by a dedicated lettings team that carried out shortlisting, home visits and viewings to ensure consistency in approach and that properties were pre-allocated ahead of the handover date. These resources have been scaled back and there is now one Housing Officer for the new build lettings.
- 3.4 In the initial phase of lettings it was expedient to have a high proportion of properties being allocated to tenants rather than based on priority award, because the council aims to assist customers in high housing need as quickly as possible rather than pre-allocating them a property that may not be available to move into for some time. The properties released by a tenant transfer have been allocated through the main lettings policy.
- 3.5 The lettings outcomes for the first phases highlighted the following:
- All tenants have had a home visit and tenancy check prior to being offered a new home
  - Positive outcomes for transferring tenants with long standing applications
  - Positive outcomes for tenants and applicants in Band B who normally miss out on housing need properties to people in Band A
  - Positive outcomes for tenants and applicants in Band C due to preference being given to waiting time

- Positive outcome for households living at height with children
- Positive outcomes for overcrowded and under occupying households
- Tenant transfers freeing up other homes to let
- Increased demand for new build homes
- Generally younger tenants between 25 – 44 years old being rehoused
- Reduced rent arrears and anti-social behaviour in the new homes

3.6 It is anticipated that there will be relatively few relets in the new build homes.

3.7 Extending the current local lettings policies means lettings will be consistent with the initial lettings and will free up homes for other people in need.

3.8 In exceptional cases where the top ranked customer on the CBL shortlist or direct let list is not a council tenant, the requirement to be a council tenant may be waived. In such a case they will normally still need to demonstrate a local connection and good tenancy record or equivalent.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 Housing Leeds consulted with local Ward Members, the local housing team local tenants and residents on each individual scheme when the initial local lettings policy was developed

4.1.2 Previous consultations on changing the Council's main lettings policy have consistently shown high levels of support for making lettings based on waiting time and local connection. With affordable social housing being a scarce resource, the Council wishes to meet the aspirations of its tenants who have abided by the terms of their tenancy agreement, but who would not necessarily receive any priority on the housing waiting list.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.3 The council has undertaken an equality and diversity impact assessment of the initial local lettings policies as they were developed and approved, which identifies the main positive and negative impacts on equality groups.

4.2.4 In developing the criteria for the local lettings policy, the Council has considered the equality groups who may be unable to meet the criteria and allowed for the criteria to be relaxed.

### **4.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 Leeds' ambition is to be the best city in the UK – fair, open and welcoming with an economy that is both prosperous and sustainable so all our communities are successful. The development of local lettings policies for new build homes will support the council's desired outcomes of improving quality of life for our residents, particularly for those who are vulnerable or in poverty.

#### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

4.4.2 The new build local lettings policies require resources to ensure enhanced verification of applicants (through home visits) prior to a formal offer of accommodation being made. Timely advertisements and shortlisting is essential to ensure the properties are let as soon as they are available to reduce potential void costs to the council.

4.4.3 Void costs associated with increased transfers may be minimised by conducting enhanced checks on existing tenancies, including a home visit to inspect the property. This is mitigated by the increased tenancy sustainment in the new builds with reduced arrears and antisocial behaviour in the new tenancies.

#### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 The Council must abide by the Housing Act 1996, as amended, in developing its allocations scheme, including local lettings policies. Local lettings policies may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and policy objectives. However, the Council must have regard to its duties under equalities legislation, as well as the requirement to give overall priority for allocations of social housing to people in the reasonable preference (housing need) categories, including homelessness, medical need or overcrowding. This is achieved through the Council's approach to lettings across the wider ward areas and city.

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

4.6.1 Potential risks associated with extending the existing local lettings policies are they are complicated to administer and resource intensive, and home visits need to be prioritised within the void period to ensure there is no delay in allocating the property.

### **5. Conclusions**

5.1 The extension of the local lettings policies in line present an opportunity for the council to address the aspirations of tenants and residents who have waited for a move, and reward people who have demonstrated a commitment to their existing tenancy.

### **6 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

6.1 None

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.