

Report of Head of Housing Management.

Report to Chief Officer, Housing Management

Date: 24th May 2019

Subject: Rehousing of tenants from the Highways high rise flats and ring-fencing void properties in order to provide preference for Highways tenants.

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Gipton and Harehills; Killingbeck and Seacroft		
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. A decision (ref: D48557) was made in April 2019 to suspend new lettings to flats and to rehouse tenants from the Highways. Included in this decision was the agreement to grant the tenants of the block priority as well as consideration to ring-fencing properties within certain areas of Leeds to assist in their rehousing.
2. This report sets out the proposals on how the awards of priority and the ring-fencing of certain properties. There are 96 secure tenancies, 2 leaseholder tenancies and 20 void properties in the 2 high rise blocks affected.
3. Given the above decision and the number of tenants requiring urgent rehousing, a proposal has been made to ring-fence prospective properties in the Killingbeck & Seacroft and Gipton & Harehills wards, which may be used to rehouse the Highways tenants.

Recommendations

That the Chief Officer, Housing Management, approves the proposed ring-fencing arrangements in order to expedite the rehousing of 96 households thereby facilitating further work to the Highways blocks.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for ring-fencing arrangements for a number of properties in the 2 wards identified, and for preference to be given to Highways tenants who bid for properties through the Council's Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system.
- 1.2 This report determines that managing the migration of 96 households to suitable alternative accommodation sensitively and efficiently will accelerate the programme for the 2 blocks.
- 1.3 The report also sets out provision for other service users who will potentially be excluded from rehousing opportunities should preference be given to Highways tenants.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The Highways blocks are system built properties of Large Panel System (LPS) construction type. Following extensive investigations into structural solutions to improve the blocks a decision has been made suspend new lettings and to require rehousing the remaining tenants.
- 2.2 In order to facilitate the rehousing of all occupants in the Highways blocks all occupant will be awarded Band A under the Housing Conditions stream of the Lettings Policy and Direct Let status (Clearance). This is provided for under the Council's Lettings Policy section 5.1.15.
- 2.3 However, as the expectation is that the majority of tenants will prefer to remain in the locality it is proposed to ring-fence certain properties to give residents of the Highways preference, as provided for under 5.1.18 of the Council's Lettings Policy. This would mean for properties advertised under the ring-fence, a Highways tenant will always be ahead of other applicants regardless of priority level.
- 2.4 Feedback from meeting tenants is that the majority of tenants wish to remain in the same locality, which includes the Killingbeck and Seacroft ward area, and also, due to the location of the flats, the Gipton and Harehills ward area. Details of the properties identified can be found in section 3.3 below.
- 2.5 Tenants will also be able to express an interest in other properties on the Leeds Homes Website and will be considered for these properties in line with the Lettings Policy.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 In developing proposals for local ring-fencing arrangements, the Council has considered the impact on other service users. Prioritising existing Highways tenants for properties will invariably reduce opportunities for other prospective tenants. In such cases we will engage with any vulnerable applicants and offer advice and assistance in terms of alternative areas where their bids may be more productive. We will also offer advice and assistance via our Housing Options service, which includes an Outreach

provision, in order to explore a private let, either as a permanent solution or on a temporary basis which would allow anyone in this situation to retain their priority status.

3.2 Any potential risk in terms of reduced housing opportunities must be offset against the desire to rehouse tenants from the Highways blocks as sensitively and efficiently as possible. Delays in rehousing all the tenants expeditiously presents risk to the Council in terms of reputational damage, tenant satisfaction, additional security costs, ASB and criminal activity. The proximity of the blocks to the A63/A64 and railway lines increases their visibility.

3.3 The properties below are the properties that have been included in the ring-fence

Property	1 bed	2 bed	Total	LLP/Retirement Life
Gipton & Harehills				
Briarsdale Court, Heights and Croft	3	134	137	35+ no children
Gipton Gate East & West	59	59	118	35+ no children
Brecon Rise & Court (highlife)	2	90	92	55+ no children
Denbigh Croft & Heights	2	87	89	55+ no children
Coldcotes walk (low rise)	7	0	7	50+
Coldcotes Walk	9	0	9	RL
St Augustine's	31	0	31	RL
Killingbeck and Seacroft				
Queensview (RL)	34 (+1 x bedsit)	56	90	RL
Queensview	0	3	3	None
Barncroft Towers	23	20	43	50+

Barncroft Heights	23	21	44	50+
Barncroft Court	24	22	46	50+
Barncroft Grange	23	22	45	50+
Parkway Grange	28	58 (+1 x 3 bed)	87	35+
Pembroke Grange and Towers	2	90	92	55+ no children
Parkway Court	28	58 (+1 x 3 bed)	87	35+
Dib Lane (low rise)	19	0	19	40+
Seacroft Gate	59	59	118	40+
Brookland Towers	30	30	60	40+
Bailey Towers	30	30	60	40+

- 3.4 As shown in the above table, the number of properties to be included in the ring-fencing arrangements is 1140, broken down as follows:
- 411 1 bedroom properties (336 general needs, 75 Retirement Life)
 - 729 2 bedroom properties (574 general needs, 155 Retirement Life)
- 3.5 This total represents approximately 44% of the total equivalent stock (1 and 2 bed flats) in these wards.
- 3.6 To reduce the negative effect on the chances of being rehoused of applicants who do not live in the Highways blocks 75% of the properties in the ring-fenced areas are advertised/direct let under the ring-fence, with the remaining 25% will be allocated under the standard Lettings Policy.
- 3.7 Most properties under the ring-fence arrangements will be advertised through the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system; where it is appropriate properties may be direct let to tenants of the highways or the nature of the clearance scheme. Where a property is advertised through the CBL then these will be included in the housing need quota; if ring-fenced properties are not accepted by Highways tenants then it will be allocated through the standard lettings process.
- 3.8 Where a prospective ring-fenced property will be suitable for more than one Highways tenant then preference will be given on the basis of:

- Level and date of priority award.
 - Meeting the lettings criteria for the property
 - Whether the property could meet a tenant's additional needs (e.g. adaptations etc.)
 - Nature of the clearance program (e.g. floor by floor, block by block etc.)
 - A like for like with their current tenancy (e.g. 2 bed flat for a 2 bed flat)
 - Tenant with the longest tenancy duration in the Highways block.
- 3.9 If a Highways tenant refuses a reasonable offer of accommodation then Housing Leeds staff will engage with the tenant as to the reasons why and further explore their housing options. Housing Leeds reserve the right to remove a tenant's priority award in line with the Lettings Policy.
- 3.10 Housing Leeds will monitor the rehousing process and if necessary make amendments to the ring-fence if required.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation has occurred with Elected Members of the affected wards.
- 4.1.2 Two public meetings took place between 7th and 8th March 2019 and options about the future of the blocks were shared and discussed with residents. In addition all residents have received communication about the decision taken to rehouse them and further, more personal and detailed, contact is planned with each of the residents.
- 4.1.3 A drop in centre has been set up in a vacant ground floor flat in a Highways block to provide dedicated rehousing support and advice to affected tenants.
- 4.1.4 Further discussions are planned with local Elected Members to discuss the proposed ring-fencing arrangements, however initial feedback indicates a desire from Members to complete the rehousing process very quickly and support initiatives to help Highways tenants receive offers of suitable accommodation in their preferred areas.
- 4.1.5 Members are acutely aware of the negative image that empty buildings can create and have expressed a desire to minimise the time the buildings are empty.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The Council has undertaken an equality and diversity impact assessment of the ring-fencing proposal, which identifies the main positive and negative

impacts on equality groups. The assessment includes an action plan to address any potential negative impacts available in Appendix 1.

- 4.2.2 The Council also recognises that The Highways is a settled community and will take into account the need to rehouse tenants sensitively to minimise any disturbance to the community and enable integration into the wider community as smoothly as possible.
- 4.2.3 In developing the criteria for the local ring-fencing policy, the Council has considered the equality groups who may be unable to meet the criteria and allowed for the criteria to be relaxed, for example, an offer could be made to a customer experiencing domestic violence who is unable to meet the local ring-fencing criteria.

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 introduction of a ring-fencing policy to support tenants who will be displaced from their homes will support the Council's desired outcomes of improving quality of life for our residents, particularly for those who are vulnerable.
- 4.3.2 The proposal for ring-fencing is also consistent with the Best City Priority to achieve Safe, Strong Communities and being responsive to local needs.
- 4.3.3 The proposal is also consistent with the Best City Priority for Housing, specifically providing the right housing options to support elderly and vulnerable residents. In addition, Tenant Satisfaction is a Best City KPI.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 There are no financial risks associated with the ring-fencing properties to facilitate the prompt rehousing of tenants from the Highways blocks.
- 4.4.2 The proposals will minimise the time taken to rehouse tenants which enables the programme of work on the Highways to occur as soon as possible.

4.4.3 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.4.1 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.

4.5 Risk Management

- 4.5.1 There is the risk that tenants will not accept an offer of a property or does not wish to move. The rehousing process will be monitored closely at a local level and there are ongoing discussions with tenants regarding their housing options.
- 4.5.2 If it becomes apparent that tenants are not accepting reasonable offers of properties then it further action would need to be considered.
- 4.5.3 There is a risk that other customers wanting to be rehoused in ring-fenced areas may complain; however the ring-fenced properties represent less than 50% of these property types in the wards. Housing Leeds will monitor the advertisement and lettings of properties under the ring-fence.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The report proposes to make priority and direct let status awards, and to ring-fence suitable properties in line with the provisions of the Lettings Policy. It details the numbers of types of properties ring-fenced and the effect it will have on other applicants wishing to be rehoused.
- 5.2 The report also outlines the criteria for rehousing Highways tenants in the most appropriate and fair manner while protecting the Council from the risk outlined above.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That the Chief Officer, Housing Management, approves the proposed ring-fencing arrangements in order to expedite the rehousing of 96 households thereby facilitating further work to the Highways blocks.

7 Background documents¹

None.

¹ 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.