

Report of Head of Neighbourhood Services

Report to Chief Officer Housing

Date: 18/11/2020

Subject: Amendment to Emergency Lettings Policy

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary

1. Main issues

- The Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme was suspended in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19 related restrictions which limited moves to critical moves only.
- An Emergency Lettings Policy (ELP) was introduced which ensured void properties were allocated as quickly as possible to those most in needs whose personal circumstances made them more vulnerable in respect of the Covid-19 pandemic such as hospital discharge or domestic violence cases. A panel was formed to implement the policy.
- As restrictions were lifted and more voids became available, the policy was amended to allow lettings to recommence on a wider scale while still prioritising those directly affected by Covid-19. There are currently no government imposed restrictions on lettings however there are still customers with an ongoing housing need which relates to Covid-19 policies.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- There are still around 80 households in temporary accommodation in hotels as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Failure to provide the right housing options to these customers will have implications on our target to minimise homelessness.
- As numbers of those suffering with Coronavirus increases, it's important that we assist our colleagues in the health and social care sector by prioritising hospital or

care home discharge cases where someone may be “bed-blocking” due to a lack of adequate housing.

- Around 9300 households on the Leeds Homes register have a recognised housing need and are encouraged to bid as part of the CBL scheme in order to build and sustain strong, safe communities.

3. Resource Implications

- The ELP will support the rehousing of applicants who are particularly affected by Covid-19 policies, reducing resourcing impacts on the health and social care sectors, and help to reduce the number of people living in emergency hotel accommodation.
- Suspending the panel, restricting the policy criteria and strengthening internal referral pathways will streamline resources involved in applying the policy.

Recommendations

- a) The Chief Officer Housing is requested to approve the amendment to the Emergency Lettings Policy, including updated emergency lettings criteria and suspending the emergency lettings panel.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To outline proposed changes to the ELP, including the proposal to suspend the panel which was formed to implement the policy.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The Emergency Policy was implemented in April initially only to rehouse customers who required urgent and critical moves.
- 2.2 Once lockdown restrictions decreased and more voids became available, the policy was expanded to include more customers with a focus on those affected by Covid-19 policies.
- 2.3 Gradually the CBL Scheme was reintroduced to allow the rest of the register to bid as more void properties became available and restrictions were lifted. The ELP and the panel remained in place to assist those who were still a priority group in light of Covid-19 restrictions.
- 2.4 During this interim period where the ELP and the CBL scheme were running concurrently, a number of processes have been put in place to ensure all properties due to be advertised are first offered to panel to be allocated in line with ELP and that the policy is implemented consistently and transparently across the city.
- 2.5 Housing Associations have also been allocating in line with the ELP and continue to do so. All lettings made in this way count towards Registered Provider nominations.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 The ELP has been reviewed (see appendix 1) and the following changes are suggested.

- 3.2 As teams knowledge of the ELP becomes more detailed and comprehensive, the need for a panel decreases as less and less inappropriate referrals are made.
- 3.3 The structures and processes put in place to allow the panel to function have therefore become cumbersome and arbitrary.
- 3.4 Less government imposed restrictions on lettings means the normal CBL scheme can be introduced and encouraged for a vast majority of applicants.
- 3.5 As numbers in the hotels decrease, referring teams and lettings teams can focus their attention on a set number of approved cases whilst most applicants continue to be rehoused through the CBL scheme.
- 3.6 The criteria for those who can be rehoused through panel has been stripped back to focus on those in supported/temporary accommodation and those being discharged from hospital.
- 3.7 Senior officers will take the lead on ensuring the policy is implemented correctly and the policy will be reviewed quarterly.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation has taken place with Housing Management, Housing Options and Health and Housing teams to ensure the most robust, consistent and transparent processes are in place.
- 4.1.2 Legal have looked over the policy to ensure it is in line with national policy.
- 4.1.3 We have engaged with the Executive Member

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 People experiencing homelessness, particularly those who are rough sleeping, are severely vulnerable during the pandemic. They are three times more likely to experience a chronic health condition including respiratory conditions such as COPD. It is not possible to self-isolate or follow sanitation guidance if you are sleeping rough or living in shared homelessness accommodation which is why the ELP needs to continue to run concurrently to the CBL scheme in order to ensure this group of people are not disproportionately affected.
- 4.2.2 There has also been a 33% increase in domestic violence since the beginning of the lockdown which has led to an increase in homelessness approaches and referrals to domestic violence hostels such as Leeds Women's Aid. By enabling supported accommodation providers such as LDVS to refer directly into the panel we can increase emergency spaces for families and women fleeing domestic violence.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 Leeds is one of the largest social landlords in the UK, and the provision of affordable and secure housing contributes to the ambitions and priorities of the Best Council Plan and the Breakthrough Projects. The lettings policy also links to the council's Tenancy Strategy, Tenancy Policy, Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy.

- 4.3.2 The full remobilisation of the CBL scheme working concurrently with certain elements of the ELP will help ensure that Leeds is preventing homelessness, assisting colleagues in health and social care and creating safe and secure communities.
- 4.3.3 The findings of this report could contribute directly to the following KPI's in the best council plan:
- Number of homeless preventions
 - Number of rough sleepers in Leeds
 - Number of permanent admissions to residential and nursing care home
 - Percentage of people with a concluded safeguarding enquiry for whom their desired outcomes were fully or partially met

Climate Emergency

- 4.3.4 There are no specific climate emergency implications arising from this report.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

- 4.4.1 Suspending the panel will free up Area Managers, Housing Managers and Principal Officer's time. Simplifying the referral procedure will save time for Team Leaders and Housing Assistants thereby freeing up resources across the directorate.
- 4.4.2 By referring ELP applicants directly to local teams, local knowledge and familiarity with cases should ensure that multiple risk assessments aren't needed which may rehouse applicants quicker, keeping void time down and ensuring value for money.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 4.5.1 All housing allocations must be compliant with the requirements in Part VI of Housing Act 1996.
- 4.5.2 A majority of lettings are being made through the normal lettings policy which is fully compliant with only a minority of properties being allocated through the emergency policy in line with city priorities and tenanted through direct lets.
- 4.5.3 The decision is exempt from call-in.

4.6 Risk management

- 4.6.1 Referring and Lettings Teams will report ELP outcomes to senior managers on a weekly basis to ensure the process remains fair, consistent, transparent, and in line with the emergency policy.
- 4.6.2 The number of people who have been accepted for rehousing under the ELP, number of tenancy commencements via ELP and number of people in hotels will be constantly monitored and if numbers needing rehousing under the ELP increase then the panel may be resurrected at any point.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The ELP continues to be relevant for as long as the pandemic exists but there is also a need to encourage the full remobilisation of lettings and the CBL scheme.

5.2 The review is intended to provide a flexible policy balancing emergency lets with ongoing application of the general lettings policy, which is able to respond to any changes in Covid19 related legislation and regulation over the coming months.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Chief Officer Housing is requested to approve the amendment to the Emergency Lettings Policy, including updated emergency lettings criteria and suspending the emergency lettings panel.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 Amended emergency lettings policy.

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.