

Local Lettings Plan for Sugar Hill, Oulton

Date: 8/10/24

Report of: Kath Bramall, Housing Manager

Report to: James Rogers, Director Communities, Housing and Environment

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

In November 2023 Executive Board delegated the creation of a Local Lettings Plan (LLP) for the new build properties at Sugar Hill to the Director of Communities, Housing & Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing.

The LLP covers the lettings of 30 grant-funded affordable rented properties being developed by Leeds Federated Housing Association and sets out the criteria under which tenants previously evicted from the site by its former owner could return as tenants of the housing association, and the first lets of the 10 replacement properties for the Regulated / Assured tenants displaced from Sugar Hill.

Recommendations

- a) Approve the local lettings plan set out in this report for the 30 affordable rent properties at the Sugar Hill Close / Wordsworth Drive development, made up of 14 x 2 bedroom and 16 x 3 bedroom houses.
- b) Approve the letting of the 10 replacement properties for the Regulated / Assured tenants through a direct offer.

What is this report about?

- 1 30 homes are being grant-funded through the Council's Affordable Housing Commuted Sums programme which will be managed by Leeds Federated Housing Association on an affordable rent.
- 2 The LLP sets out the criteria under which tenants previously displaced from the site by its former owner could return as tenants of Leeds Federated.
- 3 These tenants will be given preference for offers of the 30 affordable rent homes followed by other applicants in housing need as outlined in section 12 of this report. The LLP also covers the initial lets to the 10 protected tenants but does not cover the allocation of the Shared Ownership properties.

- 4 The LLP will cover the initial lettings of the rented properties, then lettings will revert to the standard nominations agreement.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 5 The Local Lettings Plan will ensure there is an opportunity for some of the long standing former tenants to return to the rebuilt estate.
- 6 In line with the Executive Board decision, the LLP will apply to the 30 Affordable Rent properties at Sugar Hill and Wordsworth Hill, Oulton.
- 7 Applicants must be registered on the Leeds Homes Register and be eligible to be rehoused through a nomination (in terms of their immigration status) and meet the qualification criteria in terms of behaviour.
- 8 The LLP seeks to strike a balance between the wishes of displaced tenants to return to the site and the needs of customers in housing need on the register.
- 9 Demand for social housing outstrips supply, and in 2023/24 the council let 71 general needs (non-sheltered) properties in Rothwell, of which only 54 were a 2 or 3 bed house. In the same time period the average number of bids received for properties advertised in Rothwell was:

- 2 bed house = 628 bids
- 3 bed house = 552 bids

- 10 In Q2 2024/25 the number of bids received was:

- 2 bed house = 510 bids
- 3 bed house = 819 bids

- 11 It is anticipated that demand for the new build properties is likely to be higher than for existing social housing stock and giving preference for a proportion of the homes to applicants from the register will assist people in the highest level of housing need, including applicants who are homeless, in medical need, living in poor housing conditions or who have another urgent need to move on welfare grounds.

- 12 Preference will be given in the following order:

Tier 1:

- a. Former tenants of the Sugar Hill properties who were displaced due to the demolition, where the tenancy started prior to and ended after the date that the previous landlord made clear their intentions to redevelop the site, that is 28 November 2017. There are 17 households who fall into this category. This group will be permitted to under occupy by up to 1 bedroom, based on the council's bedroom calculation, but only where an affordability assessment evidences that such under-occupation is affordable to the tenant.
- b. These applicants must be able to demonstrate a current local connection to Leeds as defined under section 199 of 1996 Housing Act, which includes 6 out of the previous 12 months or 3 out of the previous 5 years residence, current employment or close family association
- c. Lettings will be made in order of the earliest start date of their former Sugar Hill tenancy, not their current priority status.

Tier 2:

- d. The next preference group will be other applicants on the register with a local connection to the Rothwell ward who will be shortlisted in order of their housing need band. Local

connection is defined under section 199 with the same criteria for residence, employment and family association as set out in (b) above.

- 13 All applicants will need to meet the requirements of Leeds Federated Housing Association's Lettings Policy.
- 14 This LLP will apply to the first lets only, after which lettings will revert to the council's standard nominations agreement.
- 15 There are also 10 replacement properties being built for the 10 Regulated and Assured tenants. These will be let as a direct offer, without being advertised through Leeds Homes. When those tenancies become available to relet in the future, they will be let under the overarching nominations agreement between LCC and Leeds Federated Housing Association.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

- 16 The LLP will contribute to the Health and Wellbeing pillar, by benefiting the former tenants who were displaced from their homes and enabling them to return to the area alongside the protected tenants. This will support the creation of stable and thriving communities. The remaining properties will be let given preference to applicants in housing need who have a connection to the Rothwell ward area. This will provide affordable new build homes for customers who may be homeless or living in unsuitable housing conditions. The new homes will comply with Nationally Described Space Standards, enabling residents to be housed in appropriate homes to live healthy lives and having the potential to be adapted to meet changing needs.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: Rothwell

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

An online survey ran in September 2024 which asked for feedback on the proposed local lettings plan. This was promoted on the Leeds Federated and Leeds Homes websites. 193 responses were received. The full results are available in Appendix 1, and are summarised below:

- 68% of respondents supported the Tier 1 proposal to give preference to former tenants who were displaced, where the tenancy started prior to 28/11/2017
- 76% supported the proposal that these applicants must be able to demonstrate a local connection to Leeds
- 59% supported the proposal that offers to these applicants would be made based on the earliest tenancy start date at Sugar Hill, not their current priority status
- 62% supported the proposal that other households with a local connection to Rothwell ward would be shortlisted based on housing need band under Tier 2 of the LLP

These results show overall support for the proposal, although some respondents were unhappy with the LLP, stating that the properties should be let to people in housing need without any additional criteria around local connection or former residence, citing the lack of affordable housing and long waiting times.

The council has met with Save Our Homes, the residents group that has campaigned on behalf of displaced tenants. Although they support some aspects of the LLP, they have formally objected to the cut off date of November 2017.

The cut off date relates to the date of the planning application to redevelop the site. The LLP aims to support community cohesion by giving preference to long standing tenants who moved to the site prior to the redevelopment proposals, including tenants who would have rented from the Coal Board. Tenants who moved in after this date were given assured shorthold tenancies which offered much more limited security of tenure. All former tenants were offered intensive support from Housing Options to secure alternative accommodation including housing needs assessments and support with bonds and deposits.

The Council has decided to retain the cut off date so that the LLP proportionately balances the aspirations of long standing tenants, whose loss of the former community is recognised by the Council, with the current increased demand from customers on the housing register who are in urgent housing need. All properties that are not let to former tenants will be let based on the housing need of applicants. This seeks to reduce the number of people waiting for secure affordable housing. Former tenants who are not eligible under Tier 1 will have an opportunity to bid for these properties.

The Tier 1 criteria will only apply for the first time that the properties are let. This decision also takes into account the representations that all affordable rented housing at Sugar Hill should be let based on housing need as this will ensure some properties are available based on housing need and a local connection to Rothwell and all subsequent lettings will be based on need and a local connection to Rothwell.

It has been decided to keep the local connection to Rothwell requirement for all subsequent lettings because of the overall lower turnover of social rented properties in the area and in recognition of people wanting to stay in the Rothwell area.

Ward members have been kept updated on proposals and a meeting was held with them in August 2024. They are supportive of the approach outlined in this report.

What are the resource implications?

- 17 The LLP will enable a proportion of lettings to be made to customers on the Leeds Homes Register who are in housing need and could potentially be living in expensive temporary accommodation which would be a resource pressure on the council.
- 18 There may be additional void costs if tenants who have moved to LCC tenancies take up the opportunity to move to one of the new build homes, but this will free up a property for relet to other customers in housing need.
- 19 Resources required to administer the LLP in terms of advertising properties and monitoring nominations performance will be met through current resources.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 20 The key risks are around contacting eligible former tenants and ensuring they are aware of the dates the properties will be available and are given the opportunity to update their housing applications, and that they respond within a reasonable timescale to contact and any offer.
- 21 It is proposed that the former tenants will be made direct offers rather than the properties being advertised. This will reduce the risk of them missing the week of the adverts and potentially missing out on an offer of accommodation.

- 22 There is a risk in allowing these tenants to under occupy, but that is mitigated by the affordability assessment that will be undertaken prior to offer. Offers will not be made where overcrowding would result.
- 23 There is a risk some former tenants and other applicants will be dissatisfied in not being given preference under this LLP. Meetings have been held with former tenant groups and any properties that are advertised will include details of the agreed lettings criteria. The LLP aims to strike a balance between the former tenants and other applicants on the housing register who need affordable and secure homes as outlined in the consultation and engagement section above.

What are the legal implications?

- 24 The use of local lettings policies or plans is permitted by the Housing Act 1996, to allow lettings to be made outside the standard reasonable preference categories, in order to achieve a justified policy aim. In this instance, Leeds Federated and the council wish to support former tenants return to the area by giving preference for offers of the affordable rent properties. Overall, the LLP will enable other customers in housing need an opportunity to be rehoused.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

- 25 Other options of allocating the new homes under the general nominations agreement were not felt to be desirable, given the well-documented history of the site and the LLP is considered the best way to meet the needs of the eligible tenants who were displaced by their former landlord.

How will success be measured?

- 26 The outcomes of the LLP will be monitored by Leeds Federated and LCC and any lessons learned captured for future schemes.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

- 27 The LLP will be implemented when the properties are ready to be let. Leeds Federated Housing Association will lead on the lettings and LCC will support with advertising and any issues relating to the Leeds Homes Register.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 consultation results
- EDCI

Background papers

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Executive Board, 22/11/2023 13:00 \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#)