

Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Review of Housing Lettings Process

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A working group of the Scrutiny Board met on 29th July 2009 to consider the scope of this particular review. In acknowledging the proposed options for change already put forward to the Executive Board in July 2009, the working group expressed an interest in the following key areas:
- The current criteria and procedures in place when determining an individual's application to become a Council tenant and also their housing need.
 - Existing tenancy management arrangements, with a particular focus around the management of anti-social behaviour and the working relationship between the ALMOs/BITMO, the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Unit and the Police.
 - The implications of any new Government policy and guidance on the Council's powers and flexibilities in relation to lettings.

2.0 Proposed approach for the Scrutiny review

- 2.1 It is important that the Scrutiny review complements the wider piece of work already being undertaken to develop the proposals for change put forward to the Executive Board in July 2009. This will enable resources to be used effectively and also avoid duplication of work.
- 2.2 The Scrutiny review aims to take a broad look at the lettings process from the housing application stage through to tenancy management to explore where improvements in partnership working and data sharing can be made to improve the allocation and management of tenancies.
- 2.3 It is proposed that particular focus is given to the development of a robust risk assessment process where more detailed and comprehensive information is gathered at an early stage in the housing application process, such as priority assessment, and utilised effectively throughout the lettings and housing management process. Specific reference will therefore be made to the development of Personal Housing Plans (PHP) for all customers that have housing need assessments.
- 2.4 As the PHP is to be used initially by the lettings officer to help inform whether a letting should be made, Scrutiny can review whether appropriate information is being gathered as part of the PHP to assist with the overall risk assessment process. Linked to this, Scrutiny can also look into the development of an information sharing protocol between key partners, which will include Leeds Housing Options, the ALMOs, the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (ASBU) and Police Community Safety to ensure that all relevant information is being fed into the PHP process.

- 2.5 Scrutiny can then look at the next stage of the lettings process and explore how PHPs could be used to support customers during the bidding process and assist in making appropriate offers.
- 2.6 Finally, Scrutiny can look at tenancy management issues and explore how PHPs could be used as a tool for identifying the support needs of tenants and assist in making appropriate referrals to specialist support agencies and also address anti-social behaviour. Particular focus will again be around partnership working to ensure that the information being held on a customer's PHP is accurate and updated on a regular basis.
- 2.7 The Scrutiny review will also consider the implications of any new Government policy and guidance on the Council's powers and flexibilities in relation to lettings. Members will be given an opportunity to consider the Council's response to the government consultation on the new draft statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England. The new guidance aims to address the lack of awareness and understanding about allocations, and to tackle misconceptions. The deadline for this consultation is 23rd October 2009 and the new guidance is expected to be published in November 2009.

3.0 Proposed timetable:

Session 1 - Thursday 15th October 2009 at 10.00 am.

Main purpose:

To consider the Council's response to the government consultation on the new draft statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England.

To understand how Personal Housing Plans are currently used by Leeds Housing Options and the rationale for extending these for all customers that have housing need assessments.

Session 2 – Monday 16th November 2009 at 10.00 am

Main purpose:

To meet with representatives from Leeds Housing Options, ALMOS/BITMO, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and Police Community Safety to discuss the following:

- The benefits and limitations of Personal Housing Plans in the application and assessment process
- The type of information that should be included in Personal Housing Plans
- How information can be shared more effectively between the relevant partners with a view to developing an information sharing protocol

Session 3 – Tuesday 8th December 2009 at 10.00 am

Main purpose:

To meet with representatives from Leeds Housing Options, the ALMOs/BITMO and tenant representatives to consider the following:

- The level of support given to customers during the bidding process and how PHPs could be used as a tool during the bidding process and assist in making appropriate offers.
- The benefits and limitations of Introductory Tenancies and Demoted Tenancies when managing tenancies.

Session 4 – Monday 18th January 2010 at 10.00 am

Main purpose:

To meet with representatives from Leeds Housing Options, ALMOS/BITMO, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, Supporting People, and Police Community Safety to discuss the following:

- How PHPs could be used as a tool for identifying the support needs of tenants and assist in making appropriate referrals to specialist support agencies
- How PHPs could assist in the prevention of anti-social behaviour and enable a more co-ordinated approach towards enforcement action where necessary.
- Methods for ensuring that the information held on a customer's PHP is accurate and updated on a regular basis and the resource implications linked to this

Next stage:

To draft the Board's final Statement to be considered at the March pre-meeting with a view to agreeing the Statement in February.