

Meeting: Housing Sub

Date: 11 October 2021

Title: Lettings Policy Review

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Service: Housing Services

Wards affected: Borough Wide

1. Purpose of Report

This paper provides an overview of North Tyneside Council's lettings policy. It takes account of the relevant legislation and sets the context for the current lettings policy review.

A presentation will be delivered at Housing Sub on 11 October 2021. This will provide feedback on the outcomes of the previous lettings review, whilst also detailing the main areas considered under the current review.

2. Introduction

As a social landlord, North Tyneside Council must comply with relevant legislation. Of particular note to lettings is part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, which has subsequently been updated with guidance notes.

North Tyneside Council has a published lettings policy, with the most recent version approved in 2019. The lettings policy takes account of the relevant legislation, best practice and local issues.

All housing applications are assessed in accordance with the Lettings Policy, to confirm eligibility and identify priority.

Empty homes within North Tyneside are also let in line with the Lettings Policy. It is our aim to advertise as many homes as possible via Tyne and Wear Homes, a choice based lettings system. Customers are given the opportunity to review available homes and express an interest, or 'bid', for homes which match their needs and preferences.

There are also circumstances where the Authority will make a 'direct offer' to a customer, which means that we allocate a home without advertising. The majority of 'direct lets' occur where the Authority has accepted a full duty to a homeless applicant, or in cases where applicants are identified as being at high risk and require an urgent move.

3. **Details**

The North Tyneside Council Lettings Policy 2019 is a comprehensive document and includes information on the following:

- Applying for a home
- Eligibility to join the scheme
- How applications are assessed, with reasonable preference categories identified
- The bidding and shortlisting process
- Making offers of accommodation

The Lettings Policy was last reviewed in 2019. It is best practice to review the policy every two years, to ensure it remains fit for purpose and account for any changes within the sector. It is for this reason that the Lettings Policy is currently being reviewed.

Key considerations for the current review are:

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – the new legislation was enacted this year. The existing policy has been reviewed and we are satisfied that the policy already meets the requirements to provide priority for rehousing.
- EU Nationals – following a change for EEA citizens, it has also been confirmed that this is covered by current policy, due to the requirement to be ‘in a class prescribed as eligible by the Secretary of State’.
- Rent Arrears – due to the changing financial climate, it would seem appropriate to consider whether the current Lettings Policy takes account of financial circumstances, where rent arrears have accrued. For example, the government previously introduced an eviction ban (which has now been lifted), due to hardship potentially experienced during the pandemic.
The policy considers the severity of the rent arrears; wilful behaviour; and increase in rent arrears since been accepted onto the scheme. Where there are arrears and depending on the circumstances, there is the option to join the scheme, but where appropriate, with a reduced priority. In other cases, it may be more suitable to consider a direct offer.
It is therefore felt that the current policy offers a firm but fair approach, which enables individual circumstances to be assessed, both in terms of their housing need and suitability to be a tenant.
- Armed Forces – Guidance was issued by MHCLG in 2020 to ‘Improve Access to Social Housing for Members of the Armed Forces’. Whilst the current policy considers Members of the Armed Forces, additional requirements have been set which include consideration of adult children leaving the family home; disregarding lump sum payments from MOD when completing a financial assessment; and awarding priority on more than one occasion within 5 years of leaving service.

4. **Consultation**

Having completed a review of the Lettings Policy, at this stage, it is felt that there are no significant changes to be made.

Meeting with members is the first stage of the process. From there, the Lettings Review will be referred to Legal Services, to confirm wider consultation requirements.

5. Further Information

North Tyneside Council Lettings Policy 2019 can be accessed via:

https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/sites/default/files/web-page-related-files/North%20Tyneside%20Lettings%20Policy%20December%202019_1.pdf



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