

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

SCHEME OF ALLOCATIONS – SPECIAL LETTINGS INITIATIVE

1. Allocation Policy

1.1 The Allocation Policy approved by Housing & Environment Committee on 10 May 2011 provides for the allocation of properties on the Housing with Support list based on the following criterion:

Amenity Housing

Generally available to applicants of a particular age group generally 55+, who have been assessed as having health problems which are adversely affected by their current living circumstances. Amenity can have similar facilities to those in sheltered housing, but is not in a purpose-built complex and does not generally have common areas for tenants to gather, or a senior carer service.

Sheltered Housing

Sheltered properties have special facilities to make life more comfortable and safer for tenants, including a carer service. They are intended for people of pensionable age who have been assessed as having significant health issues and adverse social circumstances which would be significantly improved by living in this type of housing.

1.2 Applicants placed on this list will have been assessed by the Assessment and Advice Team and placed in one of the following priority categories for the appropriate house type.

- High
- Moderate
- Low

1.3 All applicants placed on this list are then queued in order of the date of their priority award within that category. If an applicant is re-assessed and is awarded a higher or lower priority then they will be queued on the appropriate list by the date of that new award.

1.4 Applicants are assessed as follows:-

High

- Produce an extreme improvement in the individual's quality of life
- Substantially reduce the risk of physical injury
- Where the applicants present home makes essential activities of daily living impossible and it is not practical to adapt their home to meet their needs

Medium

- Produce a significant improvement in the individual's quality of life.
- Reduce the risk of physical injury
- Where the applicants present home makes essential activities of daily living very difficult and it is not practical to adapt their home to meet their needs

Low

- Produce an improvement in the individual's quality of life.
- Reduce the risk of physical injury
- Where the applicants present home makes essential activities of daily living difficult and it is not practical to adapt their home to meet their needs

2. Stock and Demand Profile

- 2.1 Whereas there exists demand for all mainstream properties regardless of property size, type or location, the proportion of Council properties designated sheltered (8.8%) and amenity (5.2%) has led to mismatches in demand, especially for bedsit properties and multi-storey blocks.
- 2.2 Over half of all sheltered properties and a fifth of amenity are within multi-storey blocks, a relatively unusual stock composition and greatly at odds with the common perception of a 'pensioner's cottage'. Resultantly there are constant vacancies which are sought by no applicants meeting the eligibility criteria for sheltered or amenity accommodation specified in the Allocation Policy.
- 2.3 In April 2015 there were approximately 130 'low demand' sheltered and amenity properties vacant, some of which had been unoccupied for several years.

3. 'Social Need'

- 3.1 Communities, Housing & Infrastructure Committee received a report *Update of the Housing for Varying Needs Review* on 18 March 2015 and approved a recommendation for allocations to be made based on 'social need' where applicants who may be interested in sheltered or amenity housing had not been assessed as meeting the criteria.
- 3.2 Examples of these types of applicants are people that are socially isolated; may have been recently bereaved; or are struggling to heat and/or maintain their present home; these reasons could be described as "social need".
- 3.3 In circumstances where there is no demand from applicants with an assessed need for sheltered or amenity housing, then applicants who do not fulfil the criteria for these types of accommodation but meet the age criteria and would fit well with the tenant profile of the particular sheltered or amenity property are allocated the properties. Prospective tenants being considered under these criteria are interviewed by the housing officer prior to the offer being made to ensure that they will be suitable for the development for which they are being considered.
- 3.4 Tenants who are selected under this criterion will be connected to the telecare system and will be responsible for the charge for this service which is currently £1.35 per week. The television licence concession scheme at sheltered developments will not apply to social need tenants. Tenants allocated under the social need criteria will not be liable for a housing support charge at this time but should their needs change in the future then the amenity or sheltered housing support service can be provided to these tenants.

3.5 By November 2015 the revised allocations criteria had succeeded in reducing low demand properties to around 80, with particular success in minimising amenity voids.

4. Special Lettings Initiative

4.1 Due to challenges with wider voids performance, a report *Review of Void Processes* went to Communities, Housing & Infrastructure on 27 October 2015, incorporating an action plan to address contributing factors.

4.2 The report included a recommendation to create a special lettings initiative with specified minimum criteria to be considered for sheltered and amenity properties, which will ensure we hold lists for those willing to accept these, once reasonable preference has been given to those with assessed needs. The lettings initiative is also to include provision for key workers.

Minimum Criteria to Access Housing with Support list

4.3 Based on the success of the 'social need' approach, the special lettings initiative seeks to open the Housing with Support list to applicants who are considered by their Housing Officer or Housing Advice Officer to fit well with the tenant profile of the particular sheltered or amenity properties sought, having regard to typical minimum ages of 50 for amenity and 55-60 for sheltered housing.

4.4 This will enable a shortlist of potential tenants to be considered by area teams on a sensitive let basis, with the same safeguards as the 'social need' allocations i.e. prospective tenants being considered on this basis will be interviewed by the Housing Officer for the vacancy prior to an offer being made to ensure that they will be suitable for the development for which they are being considered.

4.5 When referring over one or more prospective tenants for a vacancy, the Allocations Officer will highlight the details of the referring Housing Officer or Housing Advice Officer as well as the age of the tenant where it falls below the typical minimum. It is expected that the Housing Officer will speak with the referring officer prior to interviewing the applicant and/or making a decision on whether an offer should proceed.

4.6 The same precepts regarding payment of minimum telecare and/or support charges applying to 'social need' are applicable to minimum criteria applicants, who will be advised of this at both referral and offer stage.

Care Workers

4.7 Approval for the letting of properties in identified sheltered/amenity blocks was granted by Communities, Housing & Infrastructure on 19 May 2015, provided officers deem it appropriate and work has been undertaken to ensure that the public are clearly aware of the reasons for this.

4.8 Vacancies will be made available to care workers where demand has been exhausted for applicants with assessed priority, social need or minimum criteria.

5. Minimising Barriers to Letting

5.1 We recognise that some Council tenants or list applicants who may otherwise be open to considering low demand sheltered and amenity vacancies can be put off for a number of practical reasons. Accordingly we will endeavour to be flexible with prospective tenants in affording proportionate practical assistance to minimise barriers to letting, effectively 'spending to save' if it will reduce void rent loss.

5.2 These may fall into several typical scenarios, though the list is intended as a guide and is therefore not exhaustive:

Removals – Help with packing and moving furniture and other household goods where an applicant would find it difficult to arrange independently.

Furnishings – Assistance with additional furnishings which may be required e.g. carpets, curtains and appliances. These can be sourced independently or delivered/installed from the Council's existing provider.

Décor – Some applicants may require assistance with decorating the property prior to moving in; this provision may include purchase of materials to enable the tenant to arrange independently, paying for it to be done by a third party or remitting the rent for an agreed initial period to allow the new tenant time to decorate the property prior to occupation.

Rent Arrears – Similar to downsizing provisions, where an amount of outstanding rent may inhibit a move, it may be appropriate to credit an amount to enable the move to proceed.

5.3 There is deliberately no fixed amount offered within these provisions. The aim is to ensure we have flexibility in minimising any barriers to letting low demand properties and it is expected that Housing Officers will be pragmatic and proportionate in approach.

5.4 For example a 1-bedroom flat in Meadow Court which has been vacant for a year is incurring over £4k per annum in void rent loss, so agreeing say £800 in assistance will still result in a net benefit of over £3k for the HRA.

5.5 Whereas each case will be determined on merit, requests up to the value of the current downsizing grant (£1,000) can be deemed reasonable by the Housing Officer. In instances where the value is greater approval must be sought from a Senior Housing Officer.

5.6 The Area Housing Manager may also make modest discretionary provision for existing tenants of blocks who are directly disadvantaged by allocating low demand lets to a wider range of applicants e.g. by loss of TV licence exemptions.

6. Marketing of Low Demand Vacancies

- 6.1 It is important that we make low demand vacancies as attractive as possible to potential tenants, as well as adequately publicising their availability.
- 6.2A 'show flat' will be decorated and furnished in each block containing multiple long-term vacancies to ensure prospective tenants coming for a viewing see the properties to best effect. If the show flat itself is sought by an applicant, they may request some or all of the contents via the provisions in paragraph 5 and/or the furniture leasing scheme.
- 6.3 The marketing team will provide posters advertising vacancies to be displayed in housing offices; similarly this information will be published on the website. An expression of interest form which will constitute an abridged housing application will be circulated for ease of access and completion.
- 6.4 Advertisements may also be placed in various Council publications and local newspapers from time to time to ensure the public are fully aware of the availability of properties.
- 6.5 Briefings and visits to blocks containing multiple long-term vacancies will be arranged for personnel within the Housing Access Service, Housing Officers and anyone else likely to be in contact with applicants interested in low demand vacancies.
- 6.6 A bulletin of vacancies will be circulated by the Allocations Team each month to ensure relevant officers are aware of changing availability of properties.
- 6.7 Some properties may be marketed on a Choice Based Lettings basis via RSL partners to advertise as widely as possible.