

Individual Executive Decision Notice

Report title	New Build Local Lettings Plan	
Decision designation	GREEN	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing	
Wards affected	All Wards;	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook, Director of City Environment	
Originating service	Housing Strategy	
Accountable employee	Michelle Garbett	Housing Policy Officer
	Tel	01902 552954
	Email	Michelle.garbett@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	City Environment Leadership Team	16 February 2021

Summary

The New Build Local Lettings Plan was approved by Cabinet in July 2019. Following feedback from Registered Providers, it has been improved to ensure it is fair and equitable to all tenants of social housing by enabling transferring Registered Providers tenants to be able to access new build council housing as the local lettings plan already provides existing council tenants to be prioritised for homes on Registered Provider new build schemes.

Delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Assets and Housing was approved for the purpose of local lettings plans as part of the Allocations Policy Cabinet Report, February 2020.

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

That the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Environment:

1. Approve the revised New Build Local Lettings Plan expanding the additional priority afforded to transferring social housing tenants for new build homes to include tenants of Registered Providers as well as Council tenants.

2. Approve the change of terminology from Emergency Band to Highest Priority Need to take account of the addition of an Emergency+ Band that will be introduced into Allocations Policy Summer 2021.
3. Approve the increase from 10 percent to 20 percent of homes on a new build development being allocated to those in the highest priority need to assist with alleviating homelessness and the pressures on temporary accommodation.

Signature

Signature

Date:

Date:

1.0 Background

- 1.1 This report sets out the rationale for a revision to the New Build Local Lettings Plan (LLP). A LLP is a variation to the Council's Allocations Policy, which determines the priorities, and the procedure to be followed, in allocating Council and Registered Provider (RP) housing, in order to meet specific objectives that are not accounted for by the main policy.
- 1.2 The current New Build LLP was approved by Cabinet in 2019, the purpose of the LLP being to provide a clear policy on how new build council housing would be allocated, which aims to ensure the stability and sustainability of new communities created through new build development, whilst ensuring existing communities remain balanced and sustainable and are not destabilised by the letting of concentrations of new build in an area.
- 1.3 The Council's Allocations Policy recognises that from time to time certain housing stock would benefit from a local lettings plan where the needs are not met by way of the main Allocations Policy.
- 1.4 Delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director for City Assets and Housing was approved for the purpose of local lettings plans as part of the Allocations Policy Cabinet Report, February 2020.

2.0 Proposal

- 2.1 The New Build LLP sets out that 90% of properties on a new build development would be prioritised for transferring council tenants. This applies to new build homes brought forward by both the council and RPs, where RPs offer properties to let to those applicants on the housing register through the Nominations Agreements they have with the council. The LLP however, does not provide for transferring RP tenants to have the same priority when council new build becomes available.
- 2.2 As part of the consultation with RPs on the recently reviewed Nominations Agreement some of the feedback suggested a fairer and more equitable approach would be to open up priority for all new build advertised through Homes in the City to all transferring social housing tenants including both council and RP tenants, which in turn results in the release of another property for a household in housing need.
- 2.3 Additionally, the current New Build LLP prioritises 10 percent of homes on a new build development to households in the 'Emergency Band', which is the highest priority an applicant can be awarded on the housing register. Since the adoption of this LLP the review of the council's Allocations Policy has been completed, which will introduce an Emergency Band+ from summer 2021. To update the LLP to accommodate this change it is proposed that the terminology for Emergency band be changed to 'Highest Priority Need'. This will mean those households on the housing register in the greatest housing need will have the opportunity to be housed when new build properties become available to let.

2.4 It is also proposed to increase the proportion of homes on a new build development prioritised to those applicants in 'Highest Priority Need' from 10 percent to 20 percent. There has been a marked increase in the number of families in temporary accommodation and their length of stay since the New Build LLP was introduced, which has resulted in a significant increase in spend on temporary accommodation with a contributing factor being a lack of accommodation available for move on. This increase in the proportion of new build homes prioritised to those in 'Highest Priority Need' will help to alleviate some of this pressure on families in temporary accommodation whilst continuing to achieve the overall objective of the New Build LLP.

3.0 Lettings Plan Criteria

3.1 Amendments to the current New Build LLP will still aim to achieve the overall objectives of the policy by maximising the number of lettings that can be achieved through the letting of a newbuild property, prioritising a proportion for transferring tenants in housing need, who in turn free up a property for another household in housing need on the housing register; a chain letting, as well as ensuring those groups protected by an equality characteristic are not disadvantaged by this plan, ensuring a proportion are made available to those households in 'highest priority need'. The LLP will be amended in the following ways, with the updated New Build LLP set out at appendix 1.

3.2 Recognising the valuable contribution that Registered Providers make to allocations of those in the greatest need on the housing register, the New Build LLP has been revised to include existing tenants of all social housing providers in the City; this will create the opportunity for all existing social housing tenants to access new build housing.

3.3 The key amendments to the LLP criteria are set out below;

Highest Priority Need

3.4 20% of all properties will be prioritised for applicants in the highest priority need, to ensure those households on the housing register in the greatest housing need have the opportunity to be housed when new build properties become available to let.

Transfer List Applicants

3.5 Priority will be given to existing social housing tenants registered on the transfer list for the remaining 80% of properties.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

4.1 Option 1 - To leave the New Build LLP as is. Whilst this will continue to achieve the overall aims of the LLP, feedback from RPs has highlighted that it could be made more equitable to RP tenants who are considered as transferring social housing tenants for the purposes of the Allocations Policy. Not to consider and respond to this feedback could impact the relationship the council has with RPs and the properties offered to applicants on the council's housing register over and above the agreed nominations level as is

sometimes the case. Further to this, not increasing the allocation of properties to those in Highest Priority Need would not seek to alleviate the numbers of families and singles residing in temporary accommodation as a result of Homelessness or the high costs associated with this.

- 4.2 Option 2 – To approve the revisions to the New Build LLP in full. The changes maintain the rationale and spirit of the New Build LLP whilst seeking to ensure a sense of fairness across all Social Housing Providers and providing further opportunities for those applicants in the greatest housing need on the Housing Register. This would meet two of the three priorities of the Housing Strategy 2019- 2024 “Better Homes for All”; providing ‘Access to a Secure Home’ and ensuring ‘Safe and Healthy Homes’.

5.0 Reasons for decision

- 5.1 Social housing is a valued and scarce resource and it is necessary to ensure that new build stock that becomes available is utilised to its fullest benefit to both established communities and to those in the highest level of housing need on the housing register. The New Build LLP seeks to address this and puts in place a local lettings plan designed to provide a balance so that established communities are able to retain their sense of identity and cohesion whilst seeking to meet the needs of housing register applicants in the highest priority need.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 Allocating new properties to existing council tenants will result in an increased number of void properties and the associated costs e.g. void assessments, gas checks, remedial works, advertising costs etc. Extra voids will result in an increased rent loss during the void turnaround period, although this can be mitigated to some extent through early identification of transferring tenants and subsequent early identification of works required to minimise void periods.
- 6.2 The increased number to be allocated to those in the highest priority need will result in a reduction in the cost of temporary accommodation.
- 6.3 The addition of Registered Provider tenants will result in not all council new build developments being allocated to existing tenants where the council owns the stock and is responsible for the management and relet of properties. This will see a reduction in the housing the Council has available to applicants on the housing register from its own stock. This will be mitigated by the monitoring of Nominations to ensure that the void properties arising from allocation of a new build property are offered back to the council in the form of a nomination to applicants on the housing register.

[JM/12022021/L]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Section 166A (6) (b) of the 1996 Housing Act Advice enables local authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, provided that overall the authority is able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of Section 166A (3) This is the statutory basis that allows local authorities to adopt LLP's for certain parts of the social rented stock within their area. The proposed LLP is compliant with the legislation and statutory guidance in this area.

[RP/22022021/A]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 The Equalities impact assessment has been updated to incorporate the changes made to the current LLP and demonstrates positive outcomes from implementing the LLP from an Equalities perspective.

9.0 All other Implications

- 9.1 There are no further implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 New Build Local Lettings Plan – Cabinet - 10 July 2019.
- 10.2 City of Wolverhampton Councils Allocation Policy - Cabinet - 19 February 2020.

11.0 Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Local Lettings Plan – New Build Properties.