

Keyways Review

SYNOPSIS BOX

To seek approval for policy and text changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme. The changes proposed come as a result of an annual review that includes consultation and recommendations from the Scrutiny Panels (Keyways Working Party and Corby Tenants Voice). This policy underpins the allocation of social rented homes to households in the Borough and is compliant with legislation as described in Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996.

1. Introduction and Relevant Background Details

CBC's Housing Allocations policy is required to be reviewed annually. As a result of an autumn/winter 2015 review, that included consultation with the Keyways Working Party and Corby Tenants Voice; presented below are 3 items which are policy changes for consideration. As a result of ongoing monitoring of customer enquires/surgeries and complaints items 4-9 are clarification/text changes to ensure the policy remains clear, easy to understand and transparent.

Report

1 - 3 SIGNIFIES A KEY CHANGE TO POLICY

1	STATUTORY HOMELESS			
	<p>There has been a marked increase in homelessness from Autumn 2015 onwards. This in turn has caused an increase in the use of temporary accommodation, B&B usage, B&B costs and storage of furniture costs. The council's temporary accommodation is currently being fully utilised and the shortage of move on accommodation has created a waiting list for temporary accommodation and officers having to place homeless households out of the borough or in B&B where available.</p> <p>Below are the statistics showing the increases from 2014/15 to 2016/16:</p>			
		2014/15	2015/16	Percentage Increase
	Number of Homeless Applications	60	133	122%
	B & B Costs	4210	10110	140%
	Storage of Furniture Costs	3450	8400	143%
	Out of Borough Placements	14	24	71%

	<p>Although the council has the power to discharge homeless duties into the private sector, this is nearly impossible due to the scarce availability and high competition for affordable private sector 2 bedroom accommodation.</p> <p>This means that most homeless households are being awarded the highest band on Keyways (Band A) for a period of 4 weeks for one offer only.</p> <p>However, 4 weeks choice on Keyways is causing a build-up of households in temporary accommodation which then causes the increase in B&B usage, increased costs and out of borough placements for other homeless households waiting for the temporary accommodation to become available.</p> <p>Homeless applicants are placing their desire for a certain area, property type/size over their need.</p>	
	<p>Therefore the proposed revision is;</p>	<p><i>All statutory homeless applicants will continue to be awarded the highest priority (Band A) however, have 4 weeks choice to bid on Keyways removed.</i></p> <p><i>The software (Keyways) will auto bid for the next suitably sized property within the Corby Borough.</i></p> <p><i>This will be considered as a final offer to the household and a discharge of homeless duty.</i></p> <p><i>The above auto bidding currently happens on homeless applications after the four weeks choice on Keyways has expired. This proposal is to bring this forward in the process to the date of being accepted as statutory homeless.</i></p> <p><i>(Exceptional circumstances will be considered where there is evidence that a household cannot live in certain areas of Corby for safety reasons i.e. Domestic Violence)</i></p>
<p>2</p>	<p>BAND C – On Notice</p> <p>Affordable <u>family</u> accommodation in the private sector is extremely hard to source resulting in families who have been given notice through no fault of their own depending more on the social sector.</p> <p>The current Band C awarded is proving insufficient to obtain a nomination through Keyways resulting in an increase in homeless applications and the family having to move to temporary accommodation. (households with children are automatic priority need)</p> <p>In order to assist with the Prevention of Homelessness it is recommended that households with children be placed in Band B.</p>	
	<p>Therefore the proposed revision is;</p>	<p><i>Create Band B for families who have been given notice through no fault of their own.</i></p>

		<i>Change Band C for non families who have been given notice through no fault of their own. E.g. Landlords selling their property or rent increases making the property unaffordable.</i>
3	2 BEDROOM FLAT/MAISONETTES WITHOUT A GARDEN Current entitlement to this type of property is nominated on band order to singles/couples or families. This is the only type of general needs property that is not offered in the <u>first instance</u> to a household that will make use of all bedrooms. The policy needs to be consistent throughout by making best use of stock and taking into consideration future changes to the rate of housing benefit in the social sector being capped at the relevant local housing allowance rate, aligning the rules to that of the private sector. (This would result in unemployed single households under 35 years of age being awarded the room rate only which will result in a shortfall and may make a 2 bedroom property unaffordable) Supported by the Keyways Working Party and Tenants Voice.	
	Therefore the proposed revision is;	<i>Households needing 2 bedrooms will be given preference for 2 bed flats/maisonettes without a garden (over single applicants and couples)</i>
4 - 9 CLARIFICATION/TEXT CHANGES ONLY		
4	Section 6.3 Non-Qualifying Person	Clarify that CBC will not accept an application to Keyways as qualifying (local connection) solely due to another LA owing a homeless duty. The duty to secure suitable housing lies with the LA who accepts the homeless duty.
5	Section 6.6 Homeowners	Clarify that the exclusion of homeowners relates to all members of the household and includes freeholders, leaseholders and static caravan owners. (Static caravans must be on sites open all year round)
6	Section 7.13 Reviews of the Keyways Housing Register	Clarify that failure to respond to an annual review within 28 days will result in the application being closed.
7	Section 8.2 Band A Applicants –	Clarify that Band A (except Statutory Homeless) has a 4 week time limit. This can be extended in exceptional circumstances

	Additional Restrictions	where the Band reason is for the council's benefit i.e. releasing an adapted property or a suitable property to bid on has not become available in the 4 week period.
8	Section 8.4 Band C Need More Bed Spaces	Include that single main applicants require a double bed space when assessing an application for overcrowding in the current property and bedroom entitlement in the new property.
9	Section 9.1 Adapted Properties	Changes to the mobility icons to be more self explanatory as to what adaptations are in each property when advertising on Keyways. Supported by the Keyways Working Party and Tenants Voice.

2. Options to be considered:

- a. Accept the changes in full.
- b. Accept the changes in part, defining those changes that are rejected.
- c. Reject the changes in full.

3. Issues to be taken into account:-

Policy Priorities

Despite the above changes the policy's aims and objectives will remain the same. See Section 3.0 of the Keyways Housing Allocations Policy for aims and objectives.

Financial

There are no additional costs for software changes in addition to those already planned in 2016/17.

Risk

There are no risks identified.

Legal

All changes in the policy have been prepared in line with current legislation.

Performance Information

Prevention of homelessness and homeless monitoring will continue to ensure changes above have the desired effect.

Human Rights/Economic

A right to peaceful enjoyment of your property is a human right and not diminished by any recommendations included in this report.

Equalities

Due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and an Equality Questionnaire will be completed following the consultation process. This will then be reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Policy Officer.

Social

The prevention of homelessness avoids vulnerable families having to move into temporary accommodation where possible and assists with their overall well being in a crisis situation.

Community Safety

There are no implications identified as a result of these changes.

Consultation

Consultation has been conducted with the partners of the choice based lettings sub regional group (Borough Council of Wellingborough and Kettering Borough Council), Landlord Services, Housing Benefit, Environmental Quality and Legal.

Following the outcome of OCPC, any decisions approved by this committee will be subject to a 4 week consultation process with the service users of Keyways, Registered Providers, and voluntary/community organisations.

Any concerns highlighted from the external consultation will be discussed with the Chief Executive and Lead Member (Housing) before final implementation. If the concerns are significant could alter the nature and/or context of the Policy these will be brought back to Members for consideration prior to implementation.

Best Value

Keyways will remain a sub-regional scheme which shares the budgetary burden of running a CBL scheme.

Sustainability

Sustainability remains one of the areas that any review takes on. These changes are not deemed to have any detrimental impact on housing delivery or management.

4. Conclusion

The policy and text changes above will assist the council in discharging duties to statutory homeless households quicker, prevention of homeless, best use of stock and address the future Social Sector LHA Capping.

Housing Options continue to take into consideration the complaints and concerns raised by service users and have therefore recommended the changes above to address these issues and further clarify the policy in some areas.

5. Recommendation

The Committee:

- i) Agree "Option a", accept the changes in full.

Background Papers

Keyways Housing Allocation Policy

Part VI of the Housing Act 1996

Part VII of the Housing Act 1996

Localism Act 2011

Allocations of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England

Equalities Act 2010

External Consultations

Kettering Borough Council

Borough Council of Wellingborough

Registered Providers

Keyways Service Users

Member of the Homeless Operational Focus Group

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