

Executive Member Response To Housing Allocations Scrutiny Review

**Date Recommendations agreed by Community Select Committee:**

Community Select Committee, 07/02/ 2018  
(circulated 09/02/2018)

**Date responses should be made by:**

Executive responses on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holders for Housing, Health & Older People should be received by 06/04/2018

**Recommendations:**

**1.** Staff training be arranged and adhered to, to ensure consistency of service with regards to advice when moving between properties, with more support offered to tenants with literacy needs or language problems.

**Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser**

**Executive Response:**

A Check-list is in place to cover sign up requirements. Flow-charts and processes are in place for staff guidance. Further training has taken place with all staff to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities. Language line is in place for those whose require translation. Language line is a telephone service that provides an on the spot translation service for officers in access where customers are unable to communicate in English. Where there are literacy issues either a

	<p>supported tenancy officer will be in attendance or another advocate.</p> <p>A pilot is currently underway through which Supported Housing Officers will be undertaking sign-ups to ensure a smooth transition for customers moving into independent living accommodation.</p>
<p><b>2.</b> Consider the provision of shared accommodation for the under 35s who will be impacted by the Housing Benefit Cap.</p> <p><b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b></p>	<p>The proposed benefit cap for single under 35's has been abolished.</p>
<p><b>3.</b> Priority should be given to under occupiers wishing to downsize from their homes to include co-ordination with over occupiers. In addition a review of the Bands to identify customers wishing to downsize has been undertaken, and where a move is possible, a realistic timeframe be established.</p> <p><b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b></p>	<p>A recommendation that supports this proposal was approved by the Executive at its meeting in March 2018. Implementation is currently scheduled for May/June 2018 following changes being made to the Northgate system, related staff training and the uploading of April 18 rent charges.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> A review of the local connection criteria for persons moving into areas close to the Borough whilst on the housing waiting list.</p> <p><b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b></p>	<p>A recommendation that supports this proposal was approved by the Executive at its meeting in March 2018.</p>
<p><b>5.</b> That officers make alternative and improved use of hard to let sheltered accommodation that will have a positive impact on the current voids situation whilst maintaining suitable living standards.</p> <p><b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b></p>	<p>Work is in progress to make the Walpole Court voids ready for those decanting from Asquith Court to move into. Residents have started to move from Asquith Court to Walpole Court. Work will start imminently at Asquith Court to convert the units to become temporary accommodation in preparation of the Homelessness Reduction Act which comes into effect from April 2018.</p> <p>The independent living team have been showing prospective residents</p>

	<p>the different properties which are available. The team have contacted all band F's and Band Bs to Es that are over the age of 55 to see if they wish to move to Independent Living accommodation. We have around 60 people on the assisted bidding list (where bids are placed on behalf of applicants) plus other people that are bidding themselves.</p> <p>We will be looking at options appraisals on schemes that are considered hard to let. In addition to this, we have converted studio flats as they've become void (12 to date) that has resulted in successful lettings. We will continue to undertake option appraisals on all Independent Living voids in order to minimise void loss.</p>
<p>6. (i) That officers arrange a communications campaign to help 'myth bust' and liaise with Members and revisit the terminology used in all forms of communication with bidders to be clear and help manage expectations (ii) that officers specifically look at amending the terminology regarding the 'Direct List' to be replaced with another term with different connotations to help with perceptions of 'queue jumping'.</p> <p><b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b></p>	<p>The SBC website has been updated to clarify how Choice Based Lettings works in relation to an applicant's position. Clarification of how some groups can be housed sooner than others has also been included.</p> <p>This information will also be used when advising applicants</p>
<p>7. That officers should stop the current practise of automatically informing bidders where their bid was within the top 50 bids, and that a narrative be used on the bidding website to explain the scenarios that are likely to result in multiple unsuccessful bids over a long period of time.</p> <p><b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b></p>	<p>It is felt that not advising bidders of their position may lead to further suspicion over transparency. Those who do not understand their changing positions on different bids are in the minority. This is normally explained on a one on one basis when confusion occurs. The Empty Homes Manager would welcome CSC Members to sit in on a session when the shortlisting of voids takes place.</p> <p>Please see the previous comment on the update of the SBC website.</p>

<p><b>8.</b> In all cases of a new tenancy, an up-to-date gas check be completed on the property before the new tenant moves in and the gas to be approved and fully working prior to the tenant moving in. In the instances that a 'one-off' exception occurs, the tenant should be offered a suitable reduction in rent for the duration of not having a working gas supply</p> <p><b>Action: Denis Panter</b></p>	<p>SBC operates good practice with regards to current certificates for its empty homes. Whilst there would be some benefits to having the heating on in properties that are ready to let, there are also disadvantages, cost and risks to having heating and a live gas supply in an empty property. SBC carries out gas safety inspections on a 10 month programme therefore no property is ever more than 12 months between boiler services and maintenance checks. Out of 600 lettings over the past two years there have only been two instances where the boiler has not been working when a tenant moved in. The reasons for these two instances are as follows: On one occasion parts were not available so a new boiler was fitted. On the second occasion a flue was found to be too close to a vent. This should have been picked up by the engineer inspecting and capping the property. This too resulted in a new boiler being fitted. The engineer involved no longer works on the contract.</p> <p>The vast majority of incoming tenants have a gas supply within 24 hours.</p> <p>It is likely that additional resources would be required to manage, monitor and facilitate the power being on.</p> <p>This could well likely to lead to longer void times and increased void losses.</p> <p>We will continue to monitor the frequency of cases where this is an issue. If/when issues occur such cases will be prioritised for repairs.</p>
<p><b>9.</b> That officers publish an annual statement detailing allocations per band as a percentage of total allocations.</p>	<p>2017/18 is the first year reporting has been available. The results will</p>

<b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b>	be published in 'Housing Matters' which is due for publication September 2018.
<b>10.</b> That officers consider engaging a third party energy comparison partner such as Energy Angels to help tenants get the best energy deal.  <b>Action: Walter Oglina / Jaine Cresser</b>	The Investment Team are currently undertaking a strategic review with regards to appointing a third party energy comparison partner to help address fuel poverty. It is anticipated that a suitably qualified and experienced service provider will be in situ in circa 6 months post completion of the formal procurement process.