



Committee and Date  
Council

18 April 2013

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Item

**10**

Public

## **Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme: Draft for Adoption**

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Shropshire Affordable Housing Allowance Policy and Scheme is the cornerstone scheme for fairly and appropriately taking people through their housing options when seeking affordable accommodation in Shropshire. A new revised policy has been consulted upon and reported to Cabinet on 20 February. Consideration of that report was deferred to allow for an extended period of on-line consultation.
- 1.2 Feedback from the consultation has been collated and some amendments made to the Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme in response to some of the comments made. This Report summarises the changes made. The collated feedback from the initial consultation is attached as Appendix 1. Five additional responses were received following the extended consultation period. The Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme for adoption is attached as Appendix 2.

### **2. Recommendations**

Council is requested to:

- (a) Adopt and publish the Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme as contained in Appendix 2 of this report.
- (b) Note the projected implementation date of January 2014.
- (c) Agree delegation of authority to the Director of Operations to approve interim arrangements with respect to home owners in need of affordable housing.

### **3. Background Information**

- 3.1 The draft Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme as consulted reflected a range of fundamental changes to the allocation of affordable housing in Shropshire. Primary changes referred to:
- 3.1.1 Within the context of an open Housing Register, enabling preference to be given to applicants with a local connection to Shropshire.
  - 3.1.2 Targeting affordable housing to those households unable to meet their housing needs in alternative ways, reduced preference being given to households with resources in excess of £63,000.
  - 3.1.3 For those people under-occupying their current social housing, a new Gold Band category has been introduced to facilitate a move. The rules with respect to Direct Lets and Management Moves have also been varied to facilitate moving households to appropriately sized accommodation.
  - 3.1.4 With respect to adapted properties, enabling priority to be given to those households who require the existing adaptations.
  - 3.1.5 Two additional groups for targeted allocations have been introduced: Former Members of the British Armed Forces; and Community Benefit (working households, key workers and those completing pre-tenancy 'training').
- 3.2 The draft Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme was developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders, including service users, led by the Protecting and Enhancing our Environment Scrutiny Committee: Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Task and Finish Group. The draft document had therefore already been subject to extensive consultation before the formal public consultation period.
- 3.3 Feedback from the public consultation was received from the on-line 'Have Your Say' consultation facility (Shropshire Council website) although few responses (4) were submitted through this route.
- 3.4 The main source of feedback was through stakeholder focus groups, many of whom had in turn consulted with their respective stakeholders.
- 3.5 A collation of the feedback received is attached as Appendix 1, with responses to the comments made.

- 3.6 Where the feedback received has resulted in amendments to the Draft Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme, these changes are highlighted in red in the document put forward for adoption, as Appendix 2.
- 3.7 The changes to the draft policy refer primarily to:
- 3.7.1 Refusals of accommodation: up to 4 refusals of appropriate accommodation within a 12 month period may result in a suspension of offers being made for 6 months. This has been extended to include failure to respond to offers.
- 3.7.2 Gold Band awarded with respect to Category 1 Hazards under Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS): this has been amended to better reflect the varying nature of hazards in the home. Some hazards can be quickly resolved and Gold Banding would not now normally be awarded in these circumstances. The appropriateness of Gold Band status will be determined by Shropshire HomePoint in dialogue with Shropshire Council Private Sector Housing Team.
- 3.8 There was some feedback to suggest guidance notes would be helpful, particularly in relation to Local Connection: these will be produced prior to publication of the Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme.
- 3.9 Comments made that did not result in amendments to the Policy and Scheme have not been 'rejected' as such. The operation of the new Policy and Scheme will be monitored. The majority of areas where feedback has been received reflect new approaches, most of which are responses to the Localism Act 2011. The Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme is reviewed on an annual basis and feedback from this consultation will be included in the annual review in 2014.
- 3.10 Implementation of the new Shropshire Affordable Housing system Allocation Policy and Scheme is scheduled for January 2014, to allow for implementation of the associated IT and changes to operational arrangements to manage and deliver it.
- 3.11 During the interim period (to January 2014) the current Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme will continue to operate. The current 'Management Transfer' and 'Direct Let' arrangements enable management of under-occupation: the financial implications of welfare benefit changes can be managed where stock

availability allows. There are implications for owner-occupiers seeking affordable housing: the current Scheme requires exchange of contracts before applicants can 'bid' through Shropshire HomePoint. It is proposed to implement interim arrangements to enable home owners who satisfy the current 'home-owners' housing need criteria to be 'banded' and to bid for affordable housing prior to exchange of contracts.

#### **4. Risk Management and Opportunities**

**4.1 Equalities** The Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme aims to balance targeting affordable housing resources towards those most in need with the development of sustainable communities. An Equality Impact Assessment has also been produced for this Policy and Scheme.

**4.2 Environmental Impact** The delivery of the Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme does not have environmental impacts.

**4.3 Consultation** The Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme has been consulted both through the development process and through public consultation

**4.4 Risk** The new Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme is compliant with regulatory guidance.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

**5.1** A new IT system to deliver the new Policy and Scheme has been commissioned. Funding from DCLG to support roll out of Choice Based Lettings is being used to purchase the system. The new IT system will enable the Council to deliver an on-line 'assessment of potential housing options' at the point of application for affordable housing. The system also has the facility to link applicants to complementary services and into work and training opportunities. It is also capable of handling privately rented accommodation available to let.

**5.2** First year (2013/14) transition, start up and operational costs can be met from within the Council's existing budget for Shropshire HomePoint and housing allocations.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

Cabinet Report 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012 Review of Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme: Draft for Public Consultation

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Councillor Mal Price

**Local Member**

All

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 Collated feedback from Consultation :Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme

Appendix 2 Shropshire Affordable Housing Allocation Policy and Scheme for adoption (with highlighted amendments)