

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Executive Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 October 2019
<b>Subject:</b>	Homeseeker Plus Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Community Services
<b>Corporate Lead:</b>	Deputy Chief Executive
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Housing
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	Two

## **Executive Summary:**

Homeseeker Plus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by the seven local authorities in partnership with social housing landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

The seven local authorities are Tewkesbury Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

Demand for affordable social housing within the Homeseeker Plus area is very high and cannot be met from the available social housing resources. Only those in the highest housing need, with a local connection to the area are likely to obtain housing through the Homeseeker Plus scheme. Each district's Housing Advice Service will be able to advise on a range of housing options including the private rented sector.

The policy explains who is eligible and qualifies to apply on Homeseeker Plus and sets out how applications will be assessed based on housing need.

Due to legislative and other changes the policy is in need of a refresh. It is considered good practice for the partnership to consult the public and associated stakeholders on the new policy.

This appendices to this report contain the proposed policy and details the proposed changes to be consulted upon.

## **Recommendation:**

**The Committee is recommended to APPROVE the draft policy for public consultation.**

## **Reasons for Recommendation:**

To ensure an open, transparent and fair process to changes in Policy.

**Resource Implications:**

The consultation and implementation of the new policy will be met within current resources.

**Legal Implications:**

As a local housing authority the authority has a statutory duty in respect of the allocation of housing to applicants with the Borough. These duties are contained in Part VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

In addition to these duties, the authority has a duty to ensure that it operates in accordance with its duties under the Equalities Act 2010.

When considering changes to the policy the authority must undertake a fair, reasonable and transparent consultation and consider any responses to that consultation before determining whether or not to make changes to the policy.

**Risk Management Implications:**

Not consulting on the proposed policy would be denying the public and other stakeholders the opportunity to input into the policy.

Not approving the policy consultation would mean that Tewkesbury Borough Council would be out of step with the rest of the Homeseeker Plus partnership and would be treating its clients in a different way to other partners.

**Performance Management Follow-up:**

The final policy will be brought back to this Committee for final approval along with any comments resulting from the public consultation.

**Environmental Implications:**

None arising directly from this report.

**1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Homeseeker Plus is a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme run by seven local authorities in partnership with the majority of Social Housing Landlords operating within Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire which enables Social Housing Landlords to advertise their homes and for applicants to bid for properties they are interested in.
- 1.2 To compliment the scheme, and ensure compliance with legislation, local strategies and policies and the Statutory Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation a Homeseeker Plus Policy has been implemented.
- 1.3 Other than a major change to the Homeseeker Policy in 2016 to include West Oxfordshire District Council into the partnership and a name change to "Homeseeker Plus" there have only been minor tweaks to the policy.
- 1.4 This has led to policy drift with it being interpreted and applied differently across the partnership. Therefore, to remove ambiguity, add clarity and also include the provision for accredited private landlords to advertise their properties a new Policy is being proposed as attached at Appendix A.

## **2.0 PROPOSED CHANGES**

- 2.1 The proposed major changes to the policy are set out in Appendix B.
- 2.2 There are a number of other minor changes to the policy which are predominantly housekeeping changes.

## **3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 3.1 In order to ensure an open, transparent and fair process to changes in Policy there are no other alternative options.

## **4.0 CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 It is proposed to consult the public on the Policy for eight weeks early in 2020. The Forest of Dean District Council will coordinate the consultations on behalf of the partnership.

## **5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

- 5.1 Tewkesbury Borough Council Housing Strategy 2017-21.

## **6.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

- 6.1 Laying the foundations: a housing strategy for England 2011.

## **7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)**

- 7.1 The consultation and implementation of the new policy will be met within current resources.

## **8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)**

- 8.1 None arising directly from this report.

## **9.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)**

- 9.1 None arising directly from this report.

## **10.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS**

- 10.1 None arising directly from this report.

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**Background Papers:** None.

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**Appendices:**

Appendix A(i) – Homeseeker Plus Policy.

Appendix A(ii) – Homeseeker Plus Policy (additional document).

Appendix B – Detail of proposed changes to the Homeseeker Plus Policy.