

South Bucks District Council Health and Housing Policy Advisory Group (19/2/15)

SUBJECT:	<i>Local Lettings Policy</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Councillor Jennifer Woolveridge – Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Martin Holt</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Michael Veryard – Housing Manager (01494 732200 mveryard@chiltern.gov.uk)</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All</i>

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to revise the Local Lettings Policy that South Bucks District Council operates within the Bucks Home Choice scheme

RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to advise the Portfolio Holder to recommend to Cabinet and Council that the revised Local Lettings Policy be adopted with delegated authority to the Director of Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to agree any minor amendments.

2. Executive Summary

Not applicable

3. Reasons for Recommendations

The recommendation is being made to ensure that South Bucks District Council has a Local Lettings Plan that is up to date and robust and can be used in conjunction with the Bucks Home Choice scheme as and when required.

4. Content of Report

4.1 Since 2009 the Council has administered social housing allocations through the Bucks Home Choice scheme. Allocations are made in accordance with the scheme's Allocation Policy which sets down the criteria for assessing who qualifies for the scheme and how qualifying applicants should be prioritised for re-housing. The Housing Act 1996 and associated legislation and guidance sets down the legal requirements for Council Allocation Policies (including what type of households should be given reasonable preference for re-housing). The Bucks Home Choice policy is drafted to meet these requirements

4.2 The Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy allows for the District Council to adopt a LLP (Local Lettings Policy) that may be applied to specific properties that are advertised via the scheme. This recognises that from time to time the District Council may want to depart from the main Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy because of housing management or policy reasons. For example, in a large block of flats the Council may wish to apply a flexible approach to lettings to ensure a mix of households (e.g. a mix of households with and without children, a mix of working and non-working households etc.) that will help with longer term housing management. In this event, the Council may wish to allocate the properties to a mix of high, medium and low priority households rather than focussing solely on high priority cases. Government guidance supports the use of LLPs for specific cases or properties subject to the Council demonstrating that overall the majority of its lettings per annum are compliant with legislation and its Allocations Policy.

4.3 In 2012, the Council adopted a LLP for South Bucks. A copy is in **Appendix 1**. This LLP was adopted to apply to vacancies generated by capital funding from the Council. This included

- properties directly funded by the Council (e.g. property purchases undertaken by L & Q with Council funding support) and
- vacancies generated as a result of Council funded schemes.

At that time, the Bucks Home Choice scheme was open to any applicants regardless of whether or not they had a local connection to South Bucks. The purpose of the LLP was to ensure that any vacancies delivered with Council funding support would only be offered to applicants with a local connection to South Bucks.

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4.4 Since this LPP was adopted, the Localism Act has given Councils more flexibility to determine who qualifies for their Allocation Policies. Consequently, a revised Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy was adopted in May 2013 and applicants are now subject to strict local connection criteria. In order to qualify for Bucks Home Choice in South Bucks an applicant must have continuously lived and/or worked in the District for a minimum period of two years. There are a small number of exceptions to this local connection requirement which can be broadly summarised as follows:

- Persons aged 55 or more (and seeking accommodation designated solely for persons aged 55 or more)
- Persons where South Bucks District Council has a statutory homelessness duty
- Service personnel and their families
- Other exceptional circumstances (e.g. applicant had to leave South Bucks for reasons out of his/her control)

(Full details of the local connection requirements and exceptions can be found at the Bucks Home Choice website at www.buckshomechoice.gov.uk)

4.5 It is proposed to revise the LLP as follows:

- As the Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy now applies a two year local connection requirement for South Bucks applicants (see above), it is no longer necessary for the LLP to set down a 12 month residence requirement. Therefore, this requirement and the associated paragraphs can be removed.
- South Bucks District Council has a nomination agreement with L & Q Housing whereby the Council can nominate tenants to 80% of L & Q vacancies in South Bucks (via Bucks Home Choice). The remaining 20% of vacancies rest with L & Q to let as it wishes. However, L & Q has previously made additional vacancies available to the Council (over and above the 80% nominations) to advertise and allocate via Bucks Home Choice. This is done on the basis that these vacancies are offered to existing L & Q tenants who are seeking a transfer. This has the advantage of generating turnover and more vacancies in the existing social housing stock. The LLP has been revised to reflect this arrangement and, more generally, to give the Council the flexibility to target specific vacancies at existing social housing tenants for time to time.
- A paragraph has been included to highlight that the Council may apply additional LLPs to specific schemes or properties from time to time. These LLPs will be adopted and published separately as and when required.

A copy of the draft revised LLP is in **Appendix B**.

5. Consultation
Not applicable

6. Options
Not applicable

7. Corporate Implications

7.1 Financial

None

7.2 Legal

The Council needs to ensure that the allocation of social housing is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and the associated legislation and guidance. The revision of the Local Lettings Policy is intended to help ensure that the Council is fully compliant with these requirements.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

The report and proposals are linked to the Council's Policy Objective "We will work towards safer and healthier local communities" which includes "Work to support the local economy through broadband roll out, affordable homes and the introduction of a local economic plan."

9. Next Step

The next step if this recommendation is accepted will be to formally adopt the Local Lettings Policy and place it on the Bucks Home Choice website.

Background Papers:	Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy (01 May 2014)
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