

THE EXECUTIVE

8 MARCH 2005

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING & HEALTH

MORE CHOICE IN LETTINGS	FOR DECISION	
<p><i>This report concerns policy issues affecting the Council and its rehousing services.</i></p> <p>Summary</p> <p>The Executive received reports on 9 November and 21 December 2004 in respect of More Choice in Lettings (MCIL) and agreed to adopt a new allocations policy, practice and procedures with effect from 1 April 2005. This is the final report prior to implementation, which covers miscellaneous items and minor amendments to complete the transition from a points system to more choice to empower housing applicants.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>The Executive is asked to agree</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. An annual review of the More Choice in Lettings Register.2. An amendment to the Key Worker Policy to ensure the scheme is open to employees resident in the Borough, as well as non-residents.3. The policy gives the Council the right to make direct offers to More Choice in Lettings applicants to whom there is an ongoing duty under homelessness legislation.4. To retain the existing criteria for assessing the size of accommodation an applicant can bid for, as indicated in para 5.5. To include in the MCIL policy that the Council does not operate blanket policies as set out in para 6.6. That the Council reserves the right to limit bids on certain properties that require sensitive letting, and support sustainable communities. <p>Reason</p> <p>The proposals will bring about the realisation of the More Choice in Lettings policy in accordance with best practice, compliance with legislation and best address local housing needs and circumstances.</p>		
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Executive on 9 November and 21 December 2004 agreed the new allocations policy 'More Choice in Lettings' and associated allocations procedures (Minutes 180 and 234 respectively). The scheme to be implemented on 1 April 2005 replaces a complex points system and complies with the amendments to Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, introduced by the Homelessness Act 2002.
- 1.2 This final report prior to implementation of the new allocations procedure addresses several miscellaneous issues and minor amendments. Appendix A attached contains the proposed final criteria.

2. Review of the More Choice in Lettings Register

- 2.1 It is proposed that a review of each application is carried out annually on the anniversary of the application. This will keep the data accurate and valid and is good practice. This procedure needs to be published as part of the Council's policy.

3. Key Worker Policy for Council Employees

- 3.1 The procedure agreed on the 21 December 2004 in respect of key workers included the criterion that employees not be resident in the Borough. This should be removed, as it would disadvantage key workers resident in the Borough.

4. Reserve the Right to Make Direct Offers

- 4.1 Homeless applicants to whom the Council has an ongoing duty (from Part VII Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homeless Act 2002) may receive a direct offer of council accommodation, if they have failed to make a bid for a suitable property within one year of the duty arising.
- 4.2 The decision as to whether a direct offer will be made will take account of the availability and location of vacant properties advertised throughout the period and any extenuating factors which have resulted in the applicant failing to bid.
- 4.3 In the event that the Council determine that the applicant has chosen not to bid for suitable property, preferring to remain in the accommodation provided under the legislation, a direct offer may be made. If this offer is rejected but deemed to be suitable, the Council may discharge its duty under the Act.

5. Criteria for Assessing the Size of Accommodation an Applicant Can Bid For

- 5.1 The criteria for assessing the size of accommodation an applicant can bid for that was included in the report agreed by the Executive on 9 November 2004 was an earlier version inadvertently included.
- 5.2 It is recommended that the existing size criteria, with the following two minor amendments, be retained (see Appendix A):

- (a) Subject to availability the Council may make a direct offer of high rise property above the 5th floor to applicants with access to children which may be larger than their assessed need.
- (b) Assessments for households including pregnant women will take account of the unborn child when assessing bedroom size.

6. Amendments to criteria supporting the policy

- 6.1 The policy agreed by the Executive on 9 November 2004 included a qualification in relation to Local Connection which stated “The applicant has family connections of special circumstances that require him/her to live locally”, and will be taken into account. This wording was inadvertently omitted from the appendix to that report.
- 6.2 In respect of ‘Property ownership and profits’, the wording of this section is to be changed to any applicants who are owner occupiers or have more than £50,000 in assets may have their priority reduced if they successfully bid for accommodation, and have alternative housing solutions available to them. This includes applications from elderly owner occupiers and supersedes the policy.
- 6.3 In order to be compliant with legislation the Council must not adopt a blanket policy. The policy should therefore include a statement that where an applicant does not meet the criteria a case assessment will be carried out and due consideration will be given in extenuating circumstances. Such decisions should be made with delegated authority by the Head of Service.

7. Limit bids on certain properties to ensure sensitive letting

- 7.1 In certain circumstances, in the role of landlord the Council will need to ensure a sensitive letting is made to a particular type of property. This may for example refer to age or gender of an applicant. In order to effectively manage the stock and sustain communities, the Council reserve this right within More Choice in Lettings Allocations Policy.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 Due to the scale and scope of the project of managing the transition from a complex points system to More Choice in Lettings, it has proved necessary to report to the Executive in stages as work has progressed.
- 8.2 Subject to the approval of the report’s recommendations a single allocations document will be published incorporating all the policy and procedures agreed in respect of More Choice Lettings. This will be circulated to Members and an abridged version will be available for the public.

The following Background Papers were used in the preparation of this report: -

More Choice in Lettings Executive Reports: 9 November 2004 and 21 December 2004.