

**REVIEW OF THE HOUSING REGISTER AND NOMINATIONS POLICY
(Report by the Head of Housing Services)**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report on the implications of the Housing Register policy and points system, introduced in September 2003 and seek approval for amendments to that policy.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Housing Register policy and points system was reviewed in 2003 and introduced in September of that year. When approving the new policy, Cabinet resolved that the effect of the change be monitored and a report submitted so that the success of the amendments may be reviewed and any recommendations for change determined.

- 2.2 Members were involved in the review at an early stage so that they had the opportunity to make recommendations and influence the development of the new policy. Councillors Baker, Banerjee, Barnes, Chandler, Elliot, Hansard, Powell and Reynolds were involved in this process.

- 2.3 The review considered three areas of the policy; firstly, who should be accepted onto the Register; secondly, the various types of housing need and which should be prioritised for assistance with housing through the Register; and thirdly, the policy relating to matching different household sizes to property types and sizes.

- 2.4 The objective of the review was to ensure that those households in greatest need are assisted with housing. Although there were several minor changes to the policy that would not have such a significant impact on the allocation of housing, there were two main areas that might. These were:

- (a) the increase in the priority awarded for overcrowding; and
- (b) the increase in the priority awarded for existing housing association tenants wishing to move to smaller accommodation.

Increase In The Priority Awarded For Overcrowding

- 2.5 Members wanted applicants living in overcrowded conditions to have the opportunity to be housed through the Register. The concern was that the majority of family accommodation was offered to homeless households due to their priority as a result of the council's statutory duties under the homelessness legislation. It was also recognised that the previous priority system did not award a sufficient priority to families having children that then needed to move to larger accommodation. This policy had a particular impact on existing housing association tenants who were unable to move when their household size increased.

The housing that they occupied would, therefore, not become available for other households needing to move into smaller accommodation.

- 2.6 The new policy addresses these concerns by awarding an increasing level of priority the longer a household has to live in an overcrowded situation. This change affected a significant number of people that are considered to be overcrowded and therefore have a high level of housing need. Approximately 25% of the 3000 households on the Register are considered to be overcrowded.
- 2.7 This policy is considered a success as the priority of overcrowded households on the Register is seen to be increasing. Officers have begun to see families that have lived in overcrowded situations for longer periods of time receiving offers through the Register. Under the previous policy this would not have been possible due to the lack of priority awarded to their circumstances.

Increase In The Priority Awarded For Housing Association Tenants Wishing To Move To Smaller Accommodation

- 2.8 The new policy saw an increase in the priority awarded to existing housing association tenants wishing to transfer to a smaller property. This policy amendment is considered a success as these applicants are now in a position on the Register where they are able to transfer. The policy allows the best use of under-occupied social rented housing stock where people are willing to move to smaller housing by releasing larger housing for other households needing family sized accommodation.

Other Policy Changes

- 2.9 The new Register policy has been in operation for over a year. There are a small number of changes required, although the majority of these are minor amendments that do not affect who is eligible for housing or how applications are prioritised. There are though two following suggested amendments that will have an impact on how the priority of applicants is calculated:
- (a) Points awarded where the applicant does not have access to a living room, for example in a shared house where the living room is used as an extra bedroom. This was not included in the original review of the policy. It is recommended that an applicant who does not have access to a living room should be awarded additional priority over an applicant that does.
 - (b) The overcrowding assessment to be based on a maximum of two children, beneath the age of 8 years, sharing a bedroom. The policy currently allows a maximum of four children, beneath the age of 8 years, to occupy a larger bedroom. It is felt that this is unrealistic in many circumstances. It is therefore recommended, in line with the policy to award higher levels of priority where overcrowding exists, to base overcrowding assessments on a maximum of two children, beneath the age of 8 years, being able to share a bedroom.

3. IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The suggested amendments to the policy can be easily achieved. The amendments will allow a greater level of fairness when prioritising households on the Register. It will affect only a small number of applicants.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The new policy has been successfully implemented. Members' main aims of increasing the priority of overcrowded households and those under-occupying housing association properties have been achieved. The full effects of the policy change relating to overcrowding will develop as overcrowded household see their priority increase year on year. The policy to allow under-occupying tenants to move more easily will help in releasing larger family housing for those newly developing families.
- 4.2 Minor amendments are suggested to the policy, as highlighted above and in the attached policy document. These are in line with the general thrust of the new policy and can be easily implemented to add a greater degree of fairness to the priority system.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 That Scrutiny Panel:
- (a) note that the previous amendments to policy are achieving their aims; and
 - (b) comment on the proposed revisions to policy prior to its submission to the Cabinet.
- 5.2 That Cabinet endorse and adopt the proposed amendments to the Housing Register and Nominations Policy, subject to the consideration of comments from the Scrutiny Panel

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Huntingdonshire District Council's Housing Register & Nominations Policy

Review of the Housing Register & Nominations Policy Report – Cabinet 17 April 2003

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