

MINUTES

Community Services Scrutiny Panel

29th July, 2008

Present: Councillors Howarth (in the Chair), Cowper, Laverick, Lightley, McDonnell, Mavin, Norman, Robinson, D Smith and Young.

Also Present: Councillors Bell, Kellett, Kelly, Stoddart, Wilkes and Wolstenholme.

1. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Walton.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3rd June, 2008, were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Allocations Policy

Lynne Boyd, Housing Manager, and Nusrat Mohammad, Strategic Older Persons Manager, were in attendance for further discussion on the Allocations Policy, with particular emphasis on the medical need aspect of the Policy.

The Housing Application Form asked detailed questions relating to any disabilities applicants may have. Where applications were received, and all questions had been completed correctly, the information provided by the applicant was reviewed by the Strategic Older Persons Manager, a qualified occupational therapist. In cases where further information was required, applicants would be contacted either by telephone, or where appropriate, a home visit and if need be, contact could be made with their GP prior to a decision being taken on their medical needs.

When placing applicants into the various bands in accordance with the Policy, medical need was taken into account. An applicant who could not be discharged from hospital, or who had no access to a toilet, and whose current property was not suitable for adaptation for example would be allocated to Band A; applicants who were just about managing in their present accommodation, but perhaps had a medical condition which would cause their condition to deteriorate fairly quickly would be placed in Band B; applicants in Band C may have a property which was currently too large for them to easily manage, or have a need to move closer to their families; while those placed in Band D could, for example, suffer from conditions related to old age, or have difficulty in accessing local services, perhaps due to a hilly route between their home and local shops, doctors etc.

In October, 2007, due to the introduction of the new Policy, the retirement of the Council's previous occupational therapist, and prior to a permanent appointment being made to the post, there had been a backlog of about 300 applicants awaiting assessment under the medical need criteria. Through a combination of more admin support being provided to the Strategic Older Persons Manager, and more efficient ways of working being introduced, this figure had been dramatically reduced. On average 10-12 applications were being received per week which required assessment of the applicant's medical need. This was a manageable amount now that admin support was available.

In all cases, the need of the applicant was considered, prior to available properties being reviewed for their appropriateness.

Where applicants wished to appeal against decision to place them in a particular band, the request for an appeal had to be made in writing; there was currently no specific form for this purpose. It

was suggested that a form be introduced for use where applicants wished to lodge an appeal against their banding, however it was considered that this could delay the appeals process further, and create additional administration. It may be possible however for a form to be devised for those who wished to use it, but continue to accept written appeals depending on the preference of the applicant.

Each District in the County had an allocations policy, which was based upon Government guidance, however there were some differences in banding criteria between individual authorities. Work was ongoing between all the appropriate authorities to produce a new policy, which would be effective County-wide, to reflect the introduction of choice-based lettings. This work had begun prior to LGR, but now also came under the remit of the housing workstream at the County Council.

The choice-based lettings scheme was to come into effect next year, and there was a need to minimise disruption to applicants wherever possible during this process, and it was considered that an appropriate recommendation be made in the report on this topic.

The Panel considered whether any further information was required prior the draft report being produced, and agreed that the information provided by the Housing Manager and Strategic Older Persons Manager was most comprehensive and that the draft report should be brought to the next Meeting of the Panel. The Chairman thanked Lynne Boyd and Nusrat Mohammad for attending the Meeting, and the most helpful information they had provided.

4. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The Meeting terminated at 5.50 pm