

# Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6 July 2012

## Durham Key Options Lettings Policy Changes



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### Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development

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#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report is to provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with more detail of the proposed changes to the Durham Key Options Lettings Policy.

#### Background

- 2 Durham Key Options (DKO) is a choice based lettings scheme. The Choice Based Lettings Scheme enables people looking for a home to bid for available properties that are advertised in their chosen areas.
- 3 An earlier presentation to the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 29 March 2012 outlined the proposed changes to the Policy. The changes reflected in this report are in line with the Localism Act 2011 and Welfare Reform Act 2012.
- 4 The DKO Policy Subgroup has been meeting to work out the details of the changes to be agreed by the DKO Board before going out to consultation.

#### Proposed changes

- 5 Banding - Currently there are nine Bands into which applicants are placed. These are bands A to F with band F being reduced priority. Bands A+, B+ and C+ were originally designed to give further priority to some applicants however in reality this has simply led to a certain amount of confusion.
- 6 The proposal is to have five Bands only in the future, A to E. Band E, is at present, for those people who are currently adequately housed and therefore have no housing need. As they are adequately housed consideration is being given to taking people off the register if they haven't put in a bid for over a year. It has been agreed to keep Band E even though the Localism Act would allow it to be removed, because it helps the harder to let properties get occupied.

- 7 Those people who are currently in Band F typically have rent arrears or have been guilty of unacceptable behaviour and it is considered that they do not qualify to be on the list. Partners will be working with these applicants to see if they should remain disqualified or if their circumstances have changed sufficiently to allow them onto the register. It is proposed that people with 8 weeks rent or mortgage arrears should be considered for disqualification from the register. Distinctions will be made between those who pay full rent and those who pay reduced rent as a result of claiming housing benefit.
- 8 The only people who can be excluded from the list are those whose immigration status means that by law they are not eligible to apply for housing.
- 9 Preference Groups - There are three new preference groups or variations on existing groups which have come about due to changes in legislation. These are as follows:

- Priority Transfers

The proposed wording is: Tenants of DKO partner organisations may be eligible for Band A placement for an initial period of 12 months to assist them to move more quickly and will be reviewed at the end of that period.

Any property released under a priority transfer should be of exceptionally high demand. This enables landlords to make best use of housing stock (for example where the property is under-occupied and is considered to be in exceptionally high demand).

- Armed Forces

Currently members of the armed forces with a housing need who have been in the forces within the last five years are placed in Band C. Government proposals may mean that former members of the armed forces get a higher priority or banding. DKO partners are waiting for further guidance from the Government on the detail behind this.

- Positive Contribution

The proposed wording is: Applicants making a positive contribution to the community through:

- Full time employment that will address skill shortages within County Durham
- Voluntary employment
- Training towards an accredited qualification towards employment that will address skill shortages within County Durham.

- 10 Discharge of Homelessness Duty - Partners have agreed to amend the homeless duty so that the time given to bid for a property within the scheme will be reduced from 12 to 4 weeks. The duty will be brought to an end if the applicant secures a DKO offer, a registered provider makes a direct let or a suitable offer of private accommodation is made.
- 11 Applicants who are vulnerable would be able to refuse an offer of private rented accommodation and retain their main housing duty priority. Vulnerable groups would include:
- Those with dependent children subject to care proceedings;
  - Applicants subject to MAPPA arrangements;
  - Those with long term disabilities;
  - Those who are elderly or assessed as vulnerable for other special reason;
  - Those with enduring mental health problems;
  - Care leavers;
  - Those fleeing domestic violence.

### **Consultation**

- 12 The DKO partners are consulting with their tenants and applicants about the proposed changes. The consultation will run until the end of August. At the same time the Housing Solutions Core Team will consult the Third Sector organisations which are better dealt with as a group.
- 13 The DKO Board agreed that the appropriate role for the Council is to draw attention to the consultation that Partners are doing but not to undertake consultation itself. It is considered that an open public response is not needed as the issue will mainly affect existing tenants and applicants.
- 14 When the Consultation has finished the final version of the Policy will be prepared and a report will go to Cabinet in November and the various Partner Board meetings.

### **Recommendations**

- 15 That Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the above information and comment on the proposed changes to the DKO Lettings Policy.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance** – There are no financial implications.

**Staffing** – There are no staffing implications.

**Risk** - Risks should be minimal as these are minor changes to an existing policy.

**Equality and Diversity** – An EIA of the CBL scheme has recently been undertaken.

**Accommodation** - None.

**Crime and Disorder** - None.

**Human Rights** - None.

**Consultation** - Consultation is to be undertaken with key stakeholders.

**Procurement** - None.

**Disability Issues** – None.

**Legal Implications** - Legal implications of the proposed changes have been taken on board in the development of the proposals.