

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

**Agenda
Item No.**

Report of Corporate Director of People

**to
Cabinet**

on

5th January 2016

Report prepared by: Sharon Houlden
Head of Adult Services and Housing

Local Connection Housing Allocation Policy

People Scrutiny Committee
Executive Councillor: Councillor David Norman

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 At Full Council on 10th December 2015 the following Motion was tabled by Councillor Callaghan:-

"We call on the Council to review and amend the 3 year local entitlement for social housing rule to 7 years in line with Basildon District Council's policy who have adopted this entitlement for the last 5 years and have had no challenges. With an ever increasing local housing need we feel this is the time to review and change the policy/rule".

- 1.2 This Report considers the implications associated with this proposal.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the contents of this report and ask Officers to undertake further investigation of the issues raised and bring back a report to a future Cabinet meeting.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to have a published Housing Allocation Policy which must take into account the requirements of the Housing and Homelessness Acts. The Localism Act 2011 gave Local Authorities more discretion to determine issues such as the residency qualification to join the Housing Register.
- 3.2 The Council agreed in April 2013 to include a 3 year residency qualification which has worked well in ensuring that those accepted onto the Housing

Register have a local connection that they either live or work in the Borough. Other Councils, including Basildon Council, have decided to have a longer residency qualification of 7 years.

- 3.3 Although Members will want to ensure that the limited affordable housing stock is allocated to local households with a strong local connection to the Borough there are practical, legal and equality issues which will need to be taken into account if the local connection criteria is extended to up to 7 years from the existing 3 years.
- 3.4 Any changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy, including the residency qualification, would need to be subject to consultation.
- 3.5 The Government have recently published the Housing and Planning Bill which will come on the statute book in 2016 and there could be implications arising from the new Act on the Council's Housing Allocation Policy: such implications should be considered in the context of reviewing the local connection criteria.
- 3.6 Any proposal to extend the residency qualification from 3 to 7 years could generate complaints from local people who would then be taken off the list if they don't meet the new criteria. Officers understand that in Basildon there has been an increase in complaints from local people who consider that a 7 year residency qualification is unreasonable.
- 3.7 It is therefore recommended that officers undertake further investigation of the issues raised and bring back a report to Cabinet.
- 3.8 Even if the residency qualification is changed the Council would still have to allow anybody in the statutory 'reasonable preference' categories on to the Housing Register. These consist of ;
 - Anyone who is homeless – if they have a priority need and have lived in the Borough for 6 months
 - Anyone occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing
 - Anyone needing to move due to medical or welfare grounds
 - Anyone needing to move where failing to do so would cause hardship

4. Other Options

These will be considered when the matter comes back to Cabinet

5. Reasons for Recommendations

To address the move of motion

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

The Council's Housing Allocation Policy helps to meet the Council's Corporate Priority to enable well-planned quality housing and developments that meet the needs of Southend's residents.

6.2 Financial Implications

There will be costs to undertaking consultation and implementing any new policy.

6.3 Legal Implications

Any changes to the Housing Allocation Policy would need to be considered in light of both the Housing and Equalities legislation. A new Housing and Planning Bill is currently before Parliament and this may also result in some legal issues which will need to be considered in terms of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy.

6.4 People Implications

There will be staffing resources which would need to be dedicated to undertake and implement any review of the Housing Allocation Policy as well as dealing with cancellations, complaints enquiries and reviews.

6.5 Property Implications

As set out in the report

6.6 Consultation

There is a legal requirement to undertake comprehensive consultation on any proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy and to properly consider any responses made.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Any Change in the policy will need to be subject to an equality impact assessment.

6.8 Risk Assessment

There are no major risks associated with this Report other than the Equalities issues mentioned above.

6.9 Value for Money

There is no significant value for money implications arising from this Report.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

There are no community safety implications arising from this Report.

6.11 Background Papers

Council's Allocation Policy
Various Housing Acts
Equalities Act
Housing Codes of Guidance
Housing and Planning Bill