

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER DELEGATED DECISION

By

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR JAMES EVANS
(PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, HOUSING
AND PUBLIC PROTECTION)**

February 2019

REPORT AUTHOR: Andy Thompson (Service Manager - Tenancy Services)

SUBJECT: Common Allocations Scheme Review and Amendments

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Summary

1.1 This report requests the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Housing and Public Protection to consider and approve the proposed changes to the Council's Common Allocations Scheme.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 The Council has, since 2014, operated a Common Allocations Scheme (CAS) and a Common Housing Register (CHR). Developed under the auspices of the Powys Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP), the CAS and the CHR means that all social housing landlords in Powys allocate homes from a single register, the CHR, in accordance with the principles laid down in a shared common allocations policy, the CAS. This is to give people who wish to rent a home easier access to the widest range of properties provided by the Council and housing associations.
- 2.2 From April 2019 the CAS and the CHR are to be branded as 'Homes in Powys'. This is to emphasise the core ethos of the partnership which is to help people find and make a success of a home in Powys.
- 2.3 A new ICT system is being introduced to administer the CHR. The new system, which the SHP has agreed will be operational from April 2019, offers greater flexibility for people looking for homes and for landlords to match client needs to the most suitable home. The introduction of a new ICT system represented an opportunity to update the CAS to better reflect current housing needs, make sure the CAS is fully compliant with all relevant legislation and government guidance, the experiences of operating the CHR since 2016 and to exploit the full potential of the new ICT. The changes to the 'Homes in Powys' CAS are summarised in Appendix 1 to this report while the full CAS is attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.4 Consultation took place for a four-week period which came to end on December 7th, 2018. The time available for consultation was limited by the need to have a definitive policy in place to inform the design and

construction of the new ICT system for introduction in April 2019. A longer consultation period would have not allowed this deadline to be met because contractor capacity would not have been available again until later in 2019.

- 2.5 The consultation exercise gave residents and stakeholders the opportunity to read the full CAS, to consider the summary of the changes and share their comments with the Council. These comments have been used to inform the definitive draft of the CAS.
- 2.6 A launch programme is planned for February 2019 through May 2019, publicising the new system, encouraging 'self-serve' via the internet and requiring all applicants on the current system to re-register their housing application. This latter activity is needed because it is not possible to accurately and cost effectively transfer existing applications from the current system to the new one.

3. Options Considered / Available

- 3.1 It is a statutory requirement that the Council has an allocations policy in place under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. The policy – which for Powys is the CAS 'Homes in Powys' - needs to at all times reflect current legislation and Government guidance as well as local requirements. There were no alternative options considered, as failure to maintain an up-to-date policy would leave the Council open to challenge.

4. Preferred Choice and Reasons

- 4.1 It is important that the CAS is regularly reviewed to make sure that it remains fit for purpose and allows the limited resource of social housing to be allocated fairly, in line with legislation and with local and national priorities. The revised CAS, covered by this report, fulfils all of the Council's legal obligations in respect of the allocation of social housing.

5. Impact Assessment

- 5.1 An Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached to this report as Appendix 3.

6. Corporate Improvement Plan

- 6.1 Housing is intrinsically connected to a range of strategic priorities arising from national directives and Powys County Council's strategic and service initiatives including Vision 2025, with particular regard to the 'Residents and Communities', 'Health and Wellbeing' and 'Economy' themes, the Homelessness Strategy, the Housing Strategy and Love Where You Live. 'Homes in Powys' allows the Council and its housing association partners to be better able to support these important initiatives by making the best use of social housing and establishing detailed knowledge of where additional affordable housing is needed.

7. Local Member(s)

7.1 All electoral divisions will be affected by this proposal.

8. Other Front Line Services

8.1 The recommendation in this report does not impact on other services run by the Council or on behalf of the Council.

9. Communications

9.1 Have Communications seen a copy of this report? Yes

10. Support Services (Legal, Finance, ICT)

10.1 Legal

The Housing Act 1996 stipulates that Local Authorities are to have a written policy that determines the priorities and procedures that are to be followed in allocating accommodation. The Council also has a legal duty to keep and publish its housing allocation policy and to keep the policy under review to reflect the changes and amendments in legislation, case law, and local priorities. The Council's Common Allocation Scheme is designed to comply with current legislation and guidance including Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996; the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness (Welsh Government, 2016) and the Regulatory Framework for Housing Associations Registered in Wales (Welsh Government, 2011). It reflects the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 as well as the Allocation of Housing & Homelessness (Eligibility) (Wales) Regulations 2014.

10.2 Finance

There are no comments in respect of financial expenditure pertaining to this report.

10.3 ICT

ICT support this report and continue to work with housing to develop suitable ICT solutions that reflects this

11. Scrutiny

11.1 Has this report been scrutinised? - Yes

11.2 If Yes, what version or date of report has been scrutinised? A discussion took place around a copy of the draft policy and summary of changes.

11.3 The comments of the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee held on the 23rd January 2018, are attached at Appendix 4.

12. Data Protection

12.1 The proposal involves the processing of personal data. The Professional Lead Data Protection (Data Protection Officer) has been consulted and their comments are set out below: Appropriate documentation and agreements will be developed in support of the use of personal data and to ensure compliance with current data protection legislation.

13. Statutory Officers

13.1 Strategic Director Resources (Section 151 Officer):

13.2 Monitoring Officer:

14. Members' Interests

14.1 The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If Members have an interest, they should declare it at the start of the meeting and complete the relevant notification form.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
Approve the revised version of the Council's Common Allocations Scheme, with effect from April 1st, 2019.	The revised Common Allocations Scheme (CAS) will reflect current housing needs, make sure the CAS is fully compliant with all relevant legislation and government guidance, improve future services using the experiences of operating the CHR since 2016 and allow the Council to exploit the full potential of new ICT.

Relevant Policy (ies):	Common Allocations Scheme		
Within Policy:	Yes	Within Budget:	Yes

Relevant Local Member(s):	Applicable to all Members
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Tenancy Services Manager
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	April 1 st , 2019

Is a review of the impact of the decision required?	No
If yes, date of review	N/A
Person responsible for the review	N/A
Date review to be presented to Portfolio Holder/ Cabinet for information or further action	N/A

Contact Officer: Andy Thompson (Tenancy Services Manager)
Tel: 01597 826464
Email: andy.thompson@powys.gov.uk

Background Papers used to prepare Report: None

Appendix A: Summary of Changes to the Powys Common Allocations Scheme (CAS)

Clarification

Clearer definitions and guidance are included throughout the CAS.

On line Housing Options Wizard and application

In addition to the current application process over the phone/in person, there will from April 2019 be an option for applicants to register on line and, once registered, update their application details as and when necessary and at a time convenient to them. The Housing Options Wizard will be used for all enquiries regarding housing options and include the following options:

- Social housing
- Private rented sector housing
- Low cost home ownership options, including links to Tai Teg (explained below)
- Homeless

Introducing access levels

Every home will be assessed and categorised in one of five access levels:

- Fully wheelchair accessible
- Partially wheelchair accessible
- Complete level
- Up to five steps
- Five steps or more

Every applicant will be asked what their requirements are and wherever possible, applicants will be offered homes that match their accessibility requirements.

Priority

Extra priority will be given to:

- Key workers, based on an assessment and evidence from the Economic Development Service
- Foster Carers, supported by Social Services
- Housing First homeless candidate, supported by a multi-agency approach

Less priority will be given to:

- Applicants that are not ready to move

Financial Wellbeing Assessment

This will be introduced to assist people to manage their budget and to avoid rent arrears and people failing their tenancy.

Resettlement Passport Modules

This tenancy skills course will be introduced to give prospective tenants the opportunity to prepare themselves for a tenancy. Modules cover topics like moving home, shopping and cooking on a budget, setting up your own place, utilities, community awareness and isolation.

Preferred area

Applicants can record the area they prefer to live, even if there is no social housing. This information will be used to inform the future Council housing building programme and investment by housing associations.

Tai Teg

The Council is now a partner of Tai Teg, which operates a website to help people understand and apply for a range of affordable housing options, including low cost homes for sale and rented homes at rents lower than open market rent but higher than social rents.

Local Connection for volunteers

Applicants that volunteer in a community will be eligible for a local connection status to the area where they are volunteering

Hard to let homes

There is a process to let homes in those rare cases where there is no eligible applicant on CHR.

Appendix B: Powys Common Allocations Scheme 'Homes in Powys'

Attached to report

Appendix C: Common Allocations Scheme Impact Assessment

Attached to report