

| <b>Scrutiny Meeting</b> |  |
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| <b>Meeting Date</b>     | 24 <sup>th</sup> November 2020   |
| <b>Report Title</b>     | Housing Allocations Policy – Scrutiny Call in  |
| <b>Cabinet Member</b>   | Cllr Ben Martin, Cabinet Member for Housing  |
| <b>SMT Lead</b>         | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services  |
| <b>Head of Service</b>  | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services  |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>     | Roxanne Sheppard, Housing Options Manager and Zoe Callaway Policy and Performance Officer.                                   |
| <b>Key Decision</b>     | Yes  |
| <b>Classification</b>   | <b>Open / Restricted Appendix.</b>   |
| <b>Recommendations</b>  | 1. Scrutiny note the additional information provided in this report and the Cabinet report of 28 <sup>th</sup> October 2020. |

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides Scrutiny with an initial response to the reasons for call-in in relation to the Housing Allocations Policy and resolutions made by Cabinet on 28th October 2020.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Cabinet resolved at the meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> October to adopt a revised policy on the allocation of affordable housing in Swale. The full details of the Cabinet decision and changes recommended for adoption can be found within the Cabinet report.

- 2.2 A call-in has been made by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee for the following reasons:

- Increased pressure on the team due to increased applications and additional budget pressure that this may have.
- Increased waiting list on register and therefore creating increased pressure on the Council.
- Increased housing required, which will impact upon costs to the Council.
- Consultation responses have been disregarded and that the Cabinet did not fully consider the paper and all the evidence and information available.

- 2.3 The housing register team are resourced to deal with all applications to the housing register. The 2013 policy which introduced both qualification and housing need did not stop ineligible applicants applying. The team consistently receive around 1,700 applications per year both prior to 2013 policy changes and now. We therefore do not envisage an increased workload to the team. The Policy and Performance Officer has made an initial assessment that of the 644 applicants since 1 January 2019 which did not qualify 72 applicants would qualify based upon the revised policy. Additional time is also taken up by the team dealing with those that appeal the decision or make complaints directly or via MP/ Councillor enquiries. Therefore, officer assessment is that staffing resources and budgets will not be impacted by the administration of these policy changes.
- 2.4 The Scrutiny call-in raises concerns regarding the waiting list on the housing register and therefore placing pressure on the Council. Although additional people will be on the register, it will provide a greater choice and housing options to those with a housing need in the borough. We have a choice based lettings process in place and residents on the register can bid on properties that meet their preference and need. 100 new affordable homes were delivered last year and 99 new homes have already been delivered by the end of Q2 this year. As stated in the Cabinet report there is a significant under supply of affordable housing in the borough, but there is currently a pipeline supply of 542 affordable rent properties and the proposals by the Cabinet to directly intervene through the Local Housing Company (LHC) proposals.
- 2.5 The Scrutiny Call-in raises the issue around increase demand for housing, the demand already exists whether people qualify or not, putting harsher eligibility criteria currently reduces the housing options available to those with a housing need. Therefore, forcing them to access housing that is either unaffordable or unsuitable which in turn could place them in situation where they are homeless. This in turn would lead them to present to the Council thus increasing the workload for the housing options team and direct costs for temporary accommodation.
- 2.6 Concerns have also been raised relating to the consultation process and that this hasn't been fully considered. There was one policy change that didn't get overall support from the 93 respondents from the consultation with 44 respondents in favour of the policy change and 49 against. This was in relation to reducing residency to 2 years. The consultation was one element to gain feedback to the process, in addition case law and government guidance was reviewed and a benchmark exercise across Kent was also conducted in 2019. Current government guidance recommends a 2 year criteria and the benchmarking showed that Swale's criteria was the harshest of all Kent authorities. The policy was also considered by Policy Development and Review Committee who also recommended this policy change.

## Proposals

- 3.1 Scrutiny note the additional information provided in this report and the Cabinet report of 28<sup>th</sup> October.

## 4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 N/A

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The Policy has been reviewed by PDRC and an 8-week consultation was carried out. Registered providers were sent the consultation directly as a statutory consultee.

## 6 Implications

| Issue                                 | Implications  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Corporate Plan                        | Having a suitable and robust Housing Allocations Policy in the borough supports priorities within the corporate plan.         |
| Financial, Resource and Property      | None identified at this stage.  |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement      | Statutory guidance and case law has been considered as part of the review process.  |
| Crime and Disorder                    | None identified at this stage.  |
| Environment and Sustainability        | None identified at this stage.  |
| Health and Wellbeing                  | Banding criteria relating to health is discussed in the main body of the report.  |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety | None identified at this stage.  |
| Equality and Diversity                | A Community Impact Assessment has been prepared and throughout the policy equality and diversity of applicants is considered. |
| Privacy and Data Protection           | None identified at this stage.  |

## 7 Appendices

- 7.1 None

## **8 Background Papers**

PDRC Minutes -

<http://10.201.65.162/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=127&MId=2215&Ver=4>