

To: City Executive Board

Date: 21 January 2016

Report of: Housing Panel

Title of Report: Choice Based Lettings

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendation of the Housing Panel on the Council's rents performance

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Linda Smith

Executive lead member: Councillor Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing

Recommendation of the Housing Panel to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the two recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Introduction

1. The Housing Panel commissioned a report on proposed changes to the Choice Based Lettings scheme and considered this report at its public meeting on 10 December 2015. The Panel would like to thank Tom Porter, Allocations Manager, for providing the report and answering questions.

Summary and recommendations

2. The Panel noted the proposed change from a fortnightly lettings cycle lasting 13 days to a weekly cycle. The Panel heard that 79% of bids were submitted during the first week of the current cycle. This change, which would be authorised by the Head of Housing in early 2016, would help to minimise the loss of rental income to the Housing Revenue Account when properties become vacant. It should also even out the workload of the Allocations Team, enabling a greater focus on assisting non-bidders. The Panel welcomed this change as a sensible move, provided that any demographics that tended to bid later in the lettings cycle would not be disadvantaged as a result.

3. The Panel questioned what methods of bidding were available to people who were disabled or visually impaired. The Panel heard that assisted bidding was available and that family members or support workers could help bidders too. The Panel suggested that advice should be sought from relevant council officers and local disability groups on making the bidding process more accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Recommendation 1 – That advice should be sought from relevant council officers and local disability groups on making the Choice Based Lettings bidding process more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

4. The Panel noted that of 428 offers of housing made in the first 7 months of the year, 64 were refused. The Panel questioned how the number of refusals could be reduced and suggested that providing internal photos or holding open house sessions at advertised properties would help. The Panel heard that refusal reasons were varied and that there was a need to look at whether refusals were reasonable or unreasonable. Some people refused an offer of housing for spurious reasons although there were already penalties that could be applied if a bidder was clearly timewasting. The Panel suggested that officers should provide a breakdown of reasonable and unreasonable refusal reasons and consider positive ways of reducing these.

Recommendation 2 – That Council Officers should explore positive ways of reducing the number of offers of housing that are refused.

Further consideration

5. The Housing Panel requested a breakdown of refusal reasons and will monitor the progress of its recommendations.

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