

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## Cabinet

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015
<b>Report of:</b>	Executive Director for Economic Growth and Prosperity – Caroline Simpson
<b>Subject/Title:</b>	Revision of the Cheshire East Common Allocations Policy
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Don Stockton, Housing and Jobs

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### 1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East currently has an Allocations Policy in place which was approved in 2012 and sets out how social housing will be allocated across the authority in accordance with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996. The way in which social housing is allocated is key to creating strong, prosperous, sustainable communities.
- 1.2 As a further reflection of Cheshire East Council's commitment to put Residents First in all we do, we have undertaken a period of public consultation relating to a number of changes proposed to the existing policy.
- 1.3 The Localism Act 2011 gives Local Authorities the freedom to manage their waiting list to meet local needs and local circumstances whilst maintaining the protection provided by the statutory reasonable preference criteria, ensuring that priority still goes to those most in need.
- 1.4 The proposed changes do not impact on the current priority banding system which will remain in place.
- 1.5 The proposed changes to the existing policy include giving priority to those with a local connection, and rewarding those in work on all new developments, at first let only, with the aim of creating mixed sustainable communities. In addition we want to bring the policy in line with current legal requirements and give flexibility for Registered Provider to undertake affordability and capital limit checks as well as giving priority to our cared for children in housing need for a longer period of time.
- 1.6 Through the consultation process we have established that there is significant support from both residents and partners in relation to these changes.

1.7 We will also seek to engage further with our rural communities to ensure that residents are aware of arising vacancies and the mechanisms to take up opportunities to continue to reside within their local communities.

1.8 The full list of proposed changes is contained within Appendix 1 of this report.

## **2.0 Recommendation**

2.1 To grant permission to incorporate the eight changes outlined with Appendix 1 of the report into the Cheshire East Common Allocations Policy.

## **3.0 Reasons for Recommendation**

3.1 Local Authorities are required to regularly review their allocations policy to ensure that they are in line with not only recent legislation changes but that they meet local needs.

3.2 Approval was received by Cheshire East Cabinet to undertake a period of consultation on eight potential changes to the policy in order to reflect changes in legislation and local views.

3.3 Following completion of the consultation period permission is now being sought to incorporate these changes into the existing allocations policy.

## **4.0 Wards Affected**

4.1 All Wards

## **5.0 Local Ward Members**

5.1 All Ward Members

## **6.0 Policy Implications**

6.1 The role of the Strategic Housing service is to evaluate local housing requirements, setting out policies and programmes to reflect varied housing markets and address the needs of current and future residents across all tenures. Our vision for housing is articulated through our Housing Strategy and the Cheshire East's Allocations Policy is a key policy that helps us to deliver our ambition to create mixed sustainable communities.

## **7.0 Implications for Rural Communities**

7.1 Protecting and preserving the vibrancy of our rural communities is a priority for Cheshire East. Ensuring that communities are able to thrive

and that local facilities are retained can be achieved by creating mixed sustainable communities. The way in which social housing is allocated has a part to play in this, ensuring that housing is allocated to those who wish to remain living in the communities in which they live or work but due to continued increases in house prices feel that the market is in fact pushing them out. Affordable housing provides the opportunity to remain in communities.

Proposed changes will ensure that on all new developments priority will be given in the first instance to those with a local connection as defined in the existing policy.

- 7.2 Further work will be undertaken to strengthen links through Rural Networks with the aim of raising the profile of Cheshire Homechoice and the mechanism in which housing is allocated. Opportunities will be provided for Parish Councils to identify those in housing need and to provide advice including signposting to relevant services.

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The proposed amendments to the policy will ensure we continue to deliver best value for money and can be accommodated within the existing budgets.

## **9.0 Legal Implications**

- 9.1 Under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011 on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2012) local authorities are required to have an allocations policy and procedure in place in order to allocate social housing and under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002) to make provision for homeless households.
- 9.2 The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities the freedoms to better manage their housing waiting list by giving them the power to determine which applicants do or do not qualify for an allocation of social housing. Authorities will be able to operate a more focused list which better reflects local circumstances and can be understood more readily by local people.
- 9.3 Whilst the Act gives the local authority more freedom it is still a requirement to maintain the protection provided by the statutory reasonable preference criteria to ensure that priority for social housing goes to those in the greatest housing need.

- 9.4 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

## **10.0 Risk Management**

- 10.1 It is a statutory requirement that the Local Authority has an Allocations Policy in place that will prescribe who is eligible for an allocation of

social housing as well as identifying and prioritising different needs. Failure to have a policy in place will lead to challenge.

- 10.2 We are required to regularly review our policy and due to recent legislation changes plus local and economic impacts that have and will affect people's eligibility for social housing as well as ensuring our housing market remains vibrant and creates sustainable communities the policy needs to be revised.

## **11.0 Background and Options**

- 11.1 Appendix 1 outlines the proposed changes to the Allocations Policy.

## **12.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Karen Carsberg  
Designation: Strategic Housing and Intelligence Manager  
Tel No: 01270 686654  
Email: Karen.carsberg@cheshireeast.gov.uk