

New Build Council Housing – Local Letting Initiative

Report by Allister Short, Joint Director, Health and Social Care

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1** This Report proposes a Local Letting Initiative (LLI) to be used for the allocation of housing at Woodburn Terrace, Dalkeith.

2. Background

- 2.1** In May 2016 Midlothian Council revised its Housing Allocation Policy. As part of the changes it was proposed that a Local Letting Initiative will be developed for each new build housing site prior to the allocation of properties. It is important that we make best use of our housing stock, which includes how these are allocated. Scottish Government guidance requires that houses are let in a way that gives reasonable preference to those in greatest housing need, which makes best use of the available stock and helps to sustain communities.

- 2.2** The Scottish Government publication “Social Housing Allocations – A Practice Guide” refers to Local Lettings Initiatives, noting that legislation allows Registered Social Landlords to operate separate allocations policies for different parts of their stock. However, a Local Lettings Initiative cannot take into account:

- (i) how long a household has been resident in the area
- (ii) previous rent arrears which are no longer outstanding
- (iii) age of applicant
- (iv) income of applicant
- (v) ownership of property (this is subject to change shortly as part of the Housing (Scotland) Act (2014))

- 2.3** Midlothian Council has previously used a Transfer Led Local Lettings Initiative to allocate new build housing in communities. This helped to create a vacancy chain whereby transfer tenants would be able to move into a new build property and their existing home could be reallocated to an applicant on the Housing List. However, the 2011 Inspection Report of the Scottish Housing Regulator noted using this method meant that sometimes the Council did not always allocate properties through its LLI to households with a recognised housing need. Consequently LLIs for new build properties must clearly address housing need.

2.4 Table 1 shows the total housing mix of the development. It shows that 10 properties are being built on this site which are estimated to be completed in June 2019.

Table 1: Housing Mix at Woodburn Terrace, Dalkeith

Property Type	Number of Properties
1 Bed, 2 Person Tenement Flat	6
2 Bed, 3 Person Cottage Flat	4
Total	10

2.5 In order to allocate these units in a way that ensures a balanced and sustainable community it is recommended that the following criteria are used to allocate the first let of these units. The Housing Services team will allocate properties in the following order of priority until all properties have been allocated:

- (i) Allocate to existing council housing tenants who are on the General Needs List and are resident in the Dalkeith area.
- (ii) Allocate to Homeless and General Needs List Applicants who have chosen Dalkeith as one of their area choices whilst ensuring that, of the total allocations for this development, a target of 60% of the homes at this development are allocated to households who were resident in Dalkeith as of March 2019.

To ensure sustainability of tenancies properties will be allocated to households on the Housing List who do not have a history of anti-social behaviour.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no resource implications within this Report.

3.2 Risk

If the Council does not take into account the views of stakeholders and the analysis of letting outcomes in relation to the Housing Allocation Policy and Local Letting Initiatives it will fail to take into consideration local needs which could have negative consequences for the community.

In addition, there is a risk to the Council where the Housing Allocation Policy does not comply with legislation or guidance from the Scottish Housing Regulator. Further guidance concerning how the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 impacts upon housing allocation policy and practice is due to be published.

3.3 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

The themes addressed in this report impact on the delivery of the Single Midlothian Plan outcome measures in homelessness and stable and balanced communities. Early intervention and tackling inequalities are key priorities for Midlothian Council and the Community Planning Partnership and these proposals meet those objectives.

- ☐ Community safety
- ☒ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

3.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The core aim in the revised Allocation Policy is to offer applicants to Midlothian Council flexibility in the type and location of housing they wish to apply for. A key strength of the management of council housing in Midlothian is tenancy sustainment and introducing a Local Letting Initiative for new build developments will ensure a sustainable community.

3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The policy is based on a clear framework for prioritising applicants based on housing need and the reasonable preference criteria set out in legislation and aims to provide affordable, quality housing for people in need. The Council's Housing Allocation Policy will be reviewed during 2019.

3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The use of Local Lettings Initiatives for new build housing was recommended as part of the revisions to Midlothian Council's Housing Allocation Policy which was revised in May 2016. The key elements of the Local Letting Initiative for this development are consistent with the aims of the Policy. Consultation was carried out with service stakeholders, including Social Work Adult Care, Children and Families and Legal and Audit services in relation to this report. External consultation had also been carried out with the Registered Tenant Groups and Registered Social Landlords in Midlothian, the Housing Association Forum, tenancy support agencies, Midlothian Disability Access Panel, Shelter and the Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer.

Midlothian Council's Housing Allocation Policy and the Local Letting Initiative for this development will both be published documents which are available for tenants and housing list applicants to view.

3.7 Ensuring Equalities

The revised Housing Allocation Policy was subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment in accordance with the Council's Equalities Schemes to ensure equality of opportunity. The policy ensures that discriminatory practices and procedures are eliminated and that the needs of women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other target groups are assessed. The duties required of local authorities when letting their houses are set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

3.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not Applicable

3.9 IT Issues

Not Applicable

4 Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Approve a Local Letting Initiative outlined in Section 2.5 of this Report for the allocation of housing at Woodburn Terrace, Dalkeith to ensure the creation of a sustainable, balanced community.

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