

**MINUTES of MEETING of the MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chambers, Midlothian House, Buccleuch Street, Dalkeith on Tuesday, 20 October 2015 at 11.00 am.

**Present:-** Councillors Milligan (Chair), Bennett, Baxter, Imrie, Montgomery, Muirhead, Pottinger, Russell, Wallace and Young.

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillors Beattie, Coventry and de Vink.

**1 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were intimated.

**2 Minutes**

The Minutes of Meetings of 2 September 2015 (2 No.) were submitted and approved as correct records.

**3 Housing Allocations Policy Review 2015**

With reference to paragraph 4 of the Minutes of the Cabinet of 6 October 2015, there was submitted report, dated 9 October 2015, by the Director, Resources, incorporating a report, dated 14 September 2015, by the Joint Director, Health and Social Care, advising the Committee of the of the lettings outcomes in 2014/15 resulting from the revised Housing Allocation Policy agreed at Council on 8 January, 2013 and which was implemented in April, 2013. The report explained that the findings would inform a review of the Allocations Policy to take place during autumn/winter 2015 in accordance with the Council's decision to review the Housing Allocation Policy every two years together with tenant representatives.

The report drew attention to the lettings targets , which were 15% from the "Choice List"; 45% from the Homeless List; and 40% from the "General Needs List". The report also drew attention to the Lettings Analysis which was incorporate into the report and which showed:-

- The Housing Allocation Policy was closely meeting the targets for Waiting List Groups, with the exception of the Choice Group, which had a lower proportion of allocations than anticipated (9% in 2012/13 and 10% in 2013/14);
- There has been a reduction in lets due to fewer new build developments being completed in 2013/14 and 2014/15;

- The Policy had ensured that there had been a move away from Transfer-Led Allocations which was evidenced by a reduction in the number of lets to existing tenants;
- There had been a significant increase in households waiting for one bedroom housing resulting from the change in household size eligibility. Simultaneously, the number of households requiring two bedroom housing had decreased significantly although two bedroom housing continued to be the most common property size being let;
- There had been a reduction in lets to households with points for overcrowding and under occupation and an increase in lets to households with medical points and to homeless households;
- The use of Ready to Rent procedures had improved the speed of re-lets for properties which had previously taken longer than average to let;
- The use of Homeswapper had initially been very successful at generating increased mutual exchanges although there had been a reduction in 2014/15; and
- There had been a reduction in the number of Waiting List applicants refusing offers due to applicants being given more choice of the property types they could be offered.

The report also (i) detailed information on a number of the provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, which had yet to come into effect; (ii) advised on the current position in respect of the redevelopment of the Newbyres site at Gorebridge, from which all tenants had now been relocated; and (iii) advised that as part of the 2015 Allocation Policy Review all tenants and prospective tenants were being consulted on the current Housing Allocation Policy via a newsletter; “housing chats” events were taking place in local community meeting spaces; and officers were undertaking external consultation with key stakeholders. The outcome of the consultation exercise would be reported to Cabinet, in due course

Thereafter, the Head of Customer and Housing Services, answered questions put by Elected Members.

## **Decision**

- (a) To note that references within the consultation to reducing the proportion of lets in the “Choices” category to 10% was not a proposal but was intended to elicit views should such a proposal be considered;
- (b) To note the failure to meet the targets for the “Choices” category in both 2012/13 and 2013/14 and that whilst achieving this target had been affected by the development of Cowan Court, Penicuik in 2012/13 and the need to

prioritise the rehousing of tenants from Newbyres , Gorebridge in 2013/14, to express their concern that no apparent corrective action had been taken to address this failing and that it was therefore incongruous to consider a reduction to 10% in this category;

- (c) To note the difficulties faced by applicants currently in private sector rented property and who were in receipt housing benefit , in respect of securing employment;
- (d) To note that applicants in the final six months of a private sector lease were considered priority applicants;
- (e) To note that inducement packages remained available to encourage tenants to downsize;
- (f) To note that legislation was being promoted to control private sector rents and associated practices;
- (g) To note that guidance notes were incorporated into housing application forms;
- (h) To note that applicants were entitled to receive two offers of housing which met all their requirements;
- (i) That future reports on housing allocation provide an analysis of the numbers and types of applicants and the length of time those applicants had been waiting to be housed; and
- (j) To recommend to the Cabinet that the consultation presently being undertaken be amended to seek views on:-
  - (i) Greater priority being given to applicants for housing within the general needs category, who could establish a local connection and whose reason for relocation was to secure increased family support ; and
  - (ii) Defining the Council's policy on re-housing or assisting in re-housing of those persons who had been evicted or removed from accommodation within Midlothian or elsewhere, as a result of anti-social behaviour.

(Action: (i) Head of Customer and Housing Services; (j) Head of Customer and Housing Services/ Document and Democratic Services Manager)

The meeting terminated at 12.10 pm.