

New Build Council Housing – Local Letting Initiative

Report by Head of Housing and Customer Services

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1** This Report proposes a Local Letting Initiative (LLI) to be used for the allocation of housing in the two phases of new council housing being developed at Stobhill Road, Gorebridge.

2. Background

- 2.1** In May 2016, Midlothian Council revised its Housing Allocation Policy. As part of the changes it proposed that a Local Letting Initiative is developed for each new build housing site prior to the allocation of properties as 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 (LLI) 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 In 2014, Midlothian Council demolished 64 homes at Newbyres Crescent and Gore Avenue, Gorebridge as a result of a ground gas emissions incident. As part of arrangements to decant households from these homes, the Council agreed in June 2014 to give tenants affected by the demolition works the option of a new home at the new development at Stobhill Road, Gorebridge. In recognition of this the housing mix on the first phase at Stobhill Road was designed to accommodate the household needs of the former tenants at Newbyres Crescent/Gore Avenue. All eligible households have been informed about the progress of this development. A total of 21 out of 64 households have expressed a wish to move to a new home at this development, to be called Robert Franks Avenue and Robert Franks Gardens.

2.5 There will also be lets available for other Housing List applicants. There are currently 1,296 applicants on the Housing List for Gorebridge. However, only 507 of these applicants are actually resident in the Gorebridge area. During 2015/16 there were 32 council lets made and the last council housing site built here was New Park Gardens in 2013. Many current Gorebridge area residents face challenges in being housed in their own community due to the high demand for this area. This could result in many local residents requiring to move to another area in order to secure accommodation which meets their needs and this could impact negatively on their links to family, friends, employment etc.

2.6 Table 1 and 2 shows the total housing mix over both phases of development. It shows that 69 properties are being built on this site over two phases, with Phase 1 estimated for completion in June, 2017 and Phase 2 estimated to be completed in August, 2017.

Table 1: Housing Mix at 1st Phase, Stobhill Road (expected completion in June 2017)

Property Type	Number of Properties
2 Bed, 3 Person Cottage Flat	4
2 Bed, 4 Person House	8
3 Bed, 4 Person House	12
3 Bed, 5 Person House	8
3 Bed 5 Person Wheelchair House	1
4 Bed, 6 Person House	4
Total	37

Table 2: Housing Mix at 2nd Phase, Stobhill Road (expected completion in July 2017)

Property Type	Number of Properties
1 Bed, 2 Person Cottage Flat	14
2 Bed, 3 Person Cottage Flat	14
2 Bed, 4 Person House	3
3 Bed 5 Person Wheelchair House	1

Total	32
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2.7 In order to allocate these units in a way that ensures a balanced and sustainable community whilst recognising the needs of former tenants at Newbyres Crescent/Gore Avenue it is proposed that the following criteria are used to allocate the first let of these units. Housing Services will allocate properties in the following order of priority until all properties have been allocated:

- (i) Allocate properties to eligible tenants impacted by demolition works at Newbyres Crescent/Gore Avenue.
- (ii) Allocate to existing council housing tenants who are living in overcrowded conditions or are under occupying their current tenancy by 1 or more rooms and are resident in the Gorebridge area.
- (iii) Allocate to Homeless or General Needs List Applicants who are currently resident in the Gorebridge area and have chosen this area as one of their area choices.
- (iv) Allocate to Homeless and General Needs List Applicants who have chosen Gorebridge as one of their area choices but are not currently resident in this area.

To ensure the sustainability of tenancies these properties will be allocated to households on the Housing List who do not have any 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 due to be published in 2016 has been delayed.

3.3 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment to treat the following areas as key priorities under the Single Midlothian Plan:

- ☐ Early years and reducing child poverty
- ☐ Economic Growth and Business Support
- ☐ Positive destinations for young people.

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
 - x Adult health, care and housing
 - x Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
 - x 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 Allocation Policy was reviewed in order to better reflect the needs and demands in Midlothian, and also take account of the Welfare Reforms introduced in April, 2013.

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.

Members of Midlothian Tenants Panel and tenants affected by demolition works at Newbyres Crescent/Gore Avenue expressing an interest in being housed at this development have been consulted in relation to this Local Letting Initiative. 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 2.7 of this Report for the allocation of housing at Stobhill Road, Gorebridge to ensure the creation of a sustainable, balanced community.

Date: 28 March 2017

Report Contact: Kevin Anderson, Head of Customer and Housing Services

Tel No. 0131 271 3225

Email: kevin.anderson@midlothian.gov.uk

Background Papers: Special Council Report: Newbyres Crescent (June 2014)

