

Report

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Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	30 June 2010
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

Subject:	Housing Allocation Policy – H.M. Forces Applicants
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1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ request approval for a change to the Housing Allocation Policy in relation to H.M. Forces applicants

2 Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the provisions of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy in relation to members of H.M. Forces be endorsed such that ex H.M. Forces personnel are queued within the Urgent Housing Need list, in line with the proposal set out in section 5.
- (2) that the Council's Housing Allocation Policy be referred to the Executive Committee for formal approval.

3 Background

3.1 Following approval by the Executive Committee, South Lanarkshire Council's revised Housing Allocation Policy was introduced on 29 June 2009.

3.2 A key aim of the Allocation Policy is to ensure that applicants assessed as being in most housing need are prioritised for housing. In determining priority for housing the Council must give 'reasonable preference' to certain applicants as defined within the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. This includes people who are homeless, those living in overcrowded houses and those living in houses which do not meet tolerable standard.

3.2 Within the Allocation Policy, applicants are queued in one of four housing need lists. These are:-

- Urgent Housing Need - includes statutorily homeless applicants and those with an urgent medical need. Applicants are queued in date order.
- Other categories - includes applicants whose housing need cannot be effectively met through any of the other lists. Applicants are queued in date order.
- Transfer list - includes South Lanarkshire Council tenants and tenants living in South Lanarkshire, of Registered Social Landlords. Applicants are queued by an award of points to reflect their differing needs.

- Waiting list
 - includes applicants who are not statutorily homeless or have an urgent medical need or have a tenancy with the Council or a Registered Social Landlord (living in South Lanarkshire). Applicants are queued by an award of points to reflect their differing needs.

3.4 Prior to the introduction of the revised Allocation Policy, extensive consultation took place involving a range of organisations and stakeholders. During the consultation there was extensive support, particularly from tenants, for members of H.M. Forces to be awarded priority within the policy in recognition of their valuable contribution to society. These views were taken into account within the finalised Allocation Policy.

3.5 H.M. Forces applicants are currently queued within the Waiting List and awarded 150 points, the highest single award of points available under the policy. The aim being that this award would be sufficient to enable an offer of housing to be made after the applicant is discharged from the Forces and would prevent the need for the applicant to present as homeless. H.M. Forces applicants do not qualify for points under any other category. In addition, to ensure the needs of H.M. Forces applicants can be met within a reasonable timescale there is a requirement within the policy that applicants cannot be unreasonably restrictive in terms of their area or property choices.

3.6 As part of ongoing monitoring of the revised Allocation Policy it has become apparent that in certain areas of South Lanarkshire the points awarded to H.M. Forces applicants are insufficient to allow an offer of housing to be made. This is mainly due to other housing applicants who have cumulative need (a range of points categories awarded reflect differing circumstances) being queued above H.M. Forces applicants.

4. Review of H.M. Forces Applicants

4.1 To inform consideration of the future policy position in relation to H.M. Forces priority, the Allocation Policy Working Group, which has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Allocation Policy carried out a review of H.M. Forces applicants during May 2010.

4.2 It was found that each year relatively few applications for housing are received from members of H.M. Forces. Indeed in the last two years a total of 15 applications were received from members of H.M. Forces (10 during 2008/09 and 5 during 2009/10). As at 11 May 2010 there were a total of 22 H.M. Forces applicants queued on the waiting list. This represents only 0.1% of total applicants queued on the housing register. A breakdown of these applicants by Area Office is provided in table 1 below.

Table 1: HM Forces applicants by Area Office

Office						
Cambuslang	East Kilbride	Hamilton	Lanark	Larkhall	Rutherglen	Total
3	8	6	1	3	1	22

4.3 The current policy queues H.M. Forces applicants within the Waiting List which has resulted in them being considered for housing along with a large number of other applicants. This has adversely impacted on their likelihood of receiving an offer of housing.

- 4.4 While there was always a commitment to carry out a full evaluation of the policy at the end of the first full year of implementation, the Allocation Policy Working Group identified that there is a need to amend the policy in the short term to ensure that the policy objective of meeting the priority needs of H.M. Forces applicants can be achieved.

5. Proposed policy amendment

- 5.1 It is proposed that H.M. Forces applicants will no longer be queued with an award of points within the Waiting List. Instead, to increase the visibility of these applicants and to improve their opportunity of being housed, they will be queued on the Urgent Housing Need list in date order, when the H.M. Forces priority is awarded. The South Lanarkshire Local letting Plan target of 55% - 65% of lets to the Urgent Housing Need list will ensure that there is a sufficient volume of lets allocated to meet the needs of H.M. Forces and other applicants queued within this list.
- 5.2 The criteria for the award of H.M. Forces priority will remain unchanged from the current policy position. Specifically this includes that applicants are required to have a clear connection with South Lanarkshire either through family members, employment or having been a resident prior to joining H.M. Forces.
- 5.3 H.M. Forces applicants will continue to be subject to the same 'reasonable offer' requirements as other applicants queued within the Urgent Housing Need List and as such will be required to attend a reasonable offer interview. During the interview a range of housing options information and advice will be given to assist the applicant in making informed and appropriate choices within their application. The key objective of this approach being to ensure that H.M. Forces applicants who have a clear connection to South Lanarkshire are able to access housing by the time they are due to be discharged
- 5.4 Appendix 1 to this report sets out the proposed amendments to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy to reflect the increase in priority awarded to H.M. Forces applicants.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 It is proposed that the policy change will take effect from 2 August 2010.
- 6.2 Prior to the policy change taking effect, all H.M. Forces applicants will be advised of the change and provided with a revised personal housing statement confirming the list they are now queued within and their application preferences. H.M. Forces applicants will also be invited to attend an interview to discuss their housing options. Where the applicant cannot attend an interview it will be carried out by telephone. In addition to providing a range of housing information and advice, the interview will also include a discussion on reasonable offer requirements.
- 6.3 The allocation procedures will be amended as necessary to take account of the policy change.

7 Employee Implications

- 7.1 Training/briefing on the policy change relating to H.M. Forces applicants and the procedural and I.T. implications will be delivered to all relevant staff during July 2010.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications

9 Other Implications

9.1 There are no implications for sustainability or risk in terms of the information contained within this report.

10 Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

10.1 An equality impact assessment has been carried out on the proposal to change the policy, contained within this report and, where identified, remedial action has been taken. The assessment is that the proposal does not have any adverse impact on any part of the community covered by equalities legislation or on community relations and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

10.2 Due to the specific nature of the proposed policy change, consultation has been directed to tenants through the Central Liaison Group, Allocation Sub-group, which played a key role in the development of the allocation policy and the Local Housing Forums. Contact was also made with particular organisations which work with and/or have a focus on the interests of H.M. Forces personnel

10.3 The Central Liaison Group, Allocation Sub-group and tenants within the Local Housing Forums are broadly supportive of the needs of H.M. Forces applicants and of the policy objectives to house them within a reasonable timescale.

Lindsay Freeland

Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

4 June 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives / Values

- ◆ Improve the quality access and availability of housing
- ◆ Develop services for older people

Previous References

- ◆ Housing and Technical Resources Committee 17 February 2010
- ◆ Executive Committee 5 November 2008

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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Proposed Policy Amendment

Section 3 Housing Lists and Priorities

Section 3.2 of the policy, Urgent Housing Need, be amended as follows.

Urgent housing need

This list contains the following three categories of applicant;

- **Homeless applicants**
applicants to whom the Council has a legal duty to provide permanent accommodation under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended by Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.
- **Applicants with an urgent medical need**
applicants (or member of their moving household) with an extremely serious and enduring medical condition who are unable to occupy their present accommodation because it is wholly unsuitable in light of their medical needs and cannot be adapted to suit those needs.
- **Members of H.M. Forces**
applicants who have completed a minimum of three years service or have been injured in action or have been discharged on medical grounds; and
 - you lived in South Lanarkshire immediately prior to commencing your service; or
 - your partner is permanently resident in South Lanarkshire or previously lived in South Lanarkshire immediately prior to commencement of service or marriage/relationship; or
 - your parents are permanently resident within South Lanarkshire; or
 - you have an offer of full-time employment within South Lanarkshire.

Priority under this category will be awarded up to six months prior to and up to six weeks following the date of discharge from the service. You will be required to provide confirmation of your date of discharge and the period of your service either in the form of a letter from a senior officer or by providing a copy of your certificate of discharge.

If you are queued on this list, you are considered to have the highest priority for housing and will be queued solely according to the date of your homeless application or date of your application for urgent medical need or date H.M. Forces priority was awarded.

The remaining paragraphs within section 3.2 remain unchanged.

Section 3.4 of the policy be amended to remove H.M. Forces applicants from the list of examples of applicants eligible to queue on the Waiting List.

Section 3.6.3 of the policy be removed, the remaining sections renumbered in sequence and the reference to H.M. Forces removed from the summary of points categories table.