

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 20<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER, 2009**

**ACCESS TO HOUSING POLICY REVIEW 2009/10: PROGRESS REPORT**

**LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME: POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW**

**Report of the Chief Executive**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP1: Prosperous City; P5: Attractive and Inclusive City**

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services, CIO4: Improving Partnership Working to Deliver 'One City'.**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with a progress report on the policy review – Access to Housing.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 An initial scoping document providing several options for detailed focus was presented to the Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and looking at access to housing in Sunderland was agreed as the focus. At the committee's meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2009 that added further structure to the review and further focuses the subject area to look at the various ways local people access housing in the city and how this can be streamlined.

**3. Current Position**

- 3.1 Members agreed to the proposed use of a policy review working group to conduct the key evidence gathering aspects of the review. It was also agreed that the policy review working group will report on progress to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.
- 3.2 The membership of the policy review working group was agreed as follows:  
Councillors S Watson, D Errington, M Dixon, K Rolph and A Wilson.
- 3.3 The first meeting of this working group has been scheduled for Wednesday 28 October 2009 with officers from Health, Housing and Adult Services. The aim of this initial meeting is to provide members of the working group with an overview to the current situation in relation to allocation policies. The meeting will also include themes around Choice Based Lettings and the Fair and Flexible guidance.
- 3.4 Councillor Dixon, on behalf of the committee and working group, is attending a conference on Fairness and Flexibility in local housing. The conference will provide useful evidence on the latest thinking in relation to housing allocations policy and practice. Councillor Dixon will provide feedback on the conference to both the committee and the working group as and when appropriate.

- 3.5 Following on from the first meeting of the policy review working group a series of focus groups will be arranged with key stakeholders to the review as part of the evidence gathering process. It is also envisaged that the working group will seek to gather evidence through best practice visits to other local authorities to ascertain how they are tackling this issue.
- 3.6 The updated policy review timetable is attached as an appendix to this report for member's information.
- 3.7 Also attached for members information is a research document from the Centre for Research and Market Intelligence (CRMI) which provides some useful background information on who lives in affordable housing. The research provides some useful evidence for the review around current and future trends in social housing; it also defines 'Characteristic Groups' as well as highlighting how the profile of residents may change in the future.

#### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1 To hold the initial policy review working group and provide members with an overview of the policy topic and main issues.
- 4.2 Arrange a number of focus groups with stakeholder groups to gather further evidence for the policy review through the working group.
- 4.3 To look at organising some good practice visits for the working group with other local authorities.

#### **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1 That members note the information contained in the report.

#### **Background Papers**

- Who Lives in Affordable Housing? – Centre for Research and Market Intelligence (Housing Corporation)

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