

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 15th DECEMBER, 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 Following the initial scoping of the policy review at the committee's meeting held on 22nd September 2009, Members have commenced their evidence gathering in relation to Access to Housing in Sunderland. A number of focus groups have already been conducted and further focus groups and evidence gathering is still to take place.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 The second meeting of the Access to Housing working group took place on Thursday 12 November 2009 with representatives of social housing providers from across the city. The aim of this meeting was to provide members of the working group with the views and opinions of social housing providers in relation to allocation policies. Some of the key points raised during discussions were as follows:

- There appears to be a lack of quality housing literature.
- Confusion still exists around Gentoo and Sunderland City Council – many people still perceive the two organisations as one.
- There is no feedback for those on the waiting list. Once a person has applied there is little information provided.
- Important issue around managing expectations.
- Important that any housing service helps those with the greatest need and a common policy across Sunderland can improve this service to people.

Appendix 1 of this report provides a full report of the working group meeting for member's information.

- 3.2 As discussed at the last meeting Stephen Rudge, Head of Housing, at Coventry City Council has agreed to come to Sunderland and will discuss and exchange views and opinions on allocations policy. Mr Rudge will travel to Sunderland on the evening of 27th January 2010 and will meet with the committee and officers on Thursday 28th January 2010.
- 3.3 There may be costs associated with this visit in relation to travel and accommodation expenses. However, the scrutiny budget allows for such expenses to be incurred as part of the policy review investigations.
- 3.4 Members are aware that it was suggested to invite the Shelter Organisation to a future meeting of the committee, and discuss their viewpoint on the issues around access to housing. Following conversations with Shelter it is anticipated that they will attend either the January or February 2010 meetings.
- 3.5 A number of focus groups are also in preparation for early in the New Year these will be with Private Sector Landlords, current social housing tenants and waiting list applicants.
- 3.6 Following on from the last meeting where members agreed to invite the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities to the next committee meeting, Cllr H Trueman will be present to provide information around access to housing. Having the portfolio holder in attendance is an excellent opportunity for members to discuss issues around the key themes of the policy review. These are:
- The practicalities of a single entry point into housing.
 - A Choice Based Lettings Scheme for Sunderland.
 - The current experience of accessing housing in Sunderland.
 - Can all the various housing providers work together?
 - Is there a desire within the city from all stakeholders to achieve a single route into housing in the city?
- 3.7 The updated policy review timetable is attached at **appendix 2** to this report for member's information.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 To look at organising good practice visits for the working group with other local authorities.
- 4.2 Discuss and organise the visit from Coventry City Council to ensure both parties get the best from the visit.
- 4.3 To consider any further groups that could provide evidence to the working group and ultimately the policy review.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That members note the information contained in the report.
- 5.2 That members consider and agree to reasonable expenses in relation to travel and accommodation for the visit of Mr. Rudge from Coventry City Council.

Background Papers

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