

Body: Cabinet

Date: 14 May 2014

Subject: Housing Policy Review

Report of: Senior Head of Community

Ward(s): All Wards

Purpose: To consider proposals for amendments to be made to the Council's housing policies.

Decision Type: Key Decision

Recommendation: Cabinet is recommended to approve:

1. The Tenant Incentive Scheme being renamed the Tenant Support Scheme (TSS).
2. The TSS providing for a financial incentive only for people of non-working age in receipt of or eligible for a state retirement pension to downsize their home, the incentive being set at £250 per excess bedroom released.
3. The TSS providing that reimbursement of expenses up to a limit of £750 per household be made available to any tenant of non-working age downsizing to assist with the costs of moving home, subject to the expenditure being receipted and evidenced as being connected solely with moving home.
4. The addition of the Family Intervention Tenancy to the Council's Tenancy Policy.

Contact: Andy Thompson, Strategic Housing Manager.
Telephone: 01323 415736 or internally on extension 5736.
E-mail address: andrew.thompson@eastbourne.gov.uk

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's landlord service faces a number of challenges arising from the changes being introduced to the Welfare/Social Security system.
- 1.2 The primary changes which directly affect tenants, especially those with a low income, are:
- Spare Room Subsidy
 - The phasing out of direct payment of housing costs to social landlords, as Universal Credit is introduced over the next four years.
- 1.3 The changes which will affect tenants and non tenants alike are:
- Universal Credit

- Local Support for Council Tax
- Changes in the scope and extent of Social Security assistance for disabled people
- The introduction of a more rigorous sanctions regime for unemployed and low income working people receiving social security payments

1.4 The changes to the Welfare/Social Security system may affect the need to encourage people to downsize from larger to smaller properties.

1.5 In addition, this report introduces the option to offer a new type of tenancy to households with high support needs.

2.0 Tenants Incentive Scheme – Under-occupation

2.1 The Council currently has in place a Tenant Incentive Scheme (TIS) designed to encourage people to downsize their home by providing a financial incentive that can also help cover the costs of moving home. This scheme in allocation banding status further rewards with a higher Home Move priority for a new home, tenants who downsize to a smaller property. Any tenant who currently lives in a house, who has bedrooms surplus to their requirements and are willing to move to a flat can apply to join the TIS.

2.2 In 2013-14, the budget for the TIS doubled to cater for an increase in demand the previous year. By the end of Quarter Two, that budget has been fully utilised and provision has had to be made to allow for the total expenditure for 2013-2014 to be doubled than originally profiled.

2.3 The TIS was set up when the overriding social housing supply priority for the Housing Services team was to free up underoccupied homes. That priority has now been joined by another - to help secure smaller properties to help people downsize to avoid the impact of the spare room subsidy.

2.4 Tenants affected by the spare room subsidy now have another financial incentive to move, especially if they wish to retain their current eligibility for housing benefit. Older people who are of non-working age are not affected by the spare room subsidy.

2.6 Cabinet is therefore asked to approve that:

- ✓ The Tenant Incentive Scheme be renamed the Tenant Support Scheme (TSS).
- ✓ The TSS provides for a financial incentive only for non-working age people in receipt of or eligible for a state retirement pension to downsize their home, the incentive being set at £250 per excess bedroom released.
- ✓ The TSS provides that reimbursement of expenses up to a limit of £750 per household be made available to any non-working age tenant downsizing to assist with the costs of moving home, subject to the expenditure being receipted and evidenced as being connected solely with moving home.

3.0 Tenancy Policy

3.1 The Council's Tenancy Policy (TP) offers a number of different tenancy options to help it support households enjoy secure and sustainable

tenancies. Our presumption in favour of secure tenancies is one that has been adopted nationally by the majority of landlords working in Eastbourne and in a recent survey by Inside Housing magazine, by the majority of the country's largest councils¹. Our policy includes Introductory Tenancies to help people settle into their new home in a way that contributes positively to the wider community. Demoted tenancies are available to help the Council manage those who do not discharge in a responsible way the obligations placed upon them in their tenancy agreement.

- 3.2 An additional tenancy option is also available, tailored to suit the needs of families with multiple needs. Called the Family Intervention Tenancy, its terms tie in with the Government's Troubled Families Programme². Troubled families are those that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector. In East Sussex, a county wide initiative has been launched to help deliver the programme outcomes in the county. Eastbourne is part of this initiative. The Council also provides support for the Family Intervention Project, a local scheme that provides direct intensive support to families who need help to manage their lives.
- 3.3 Family Intervention Tenancies are designed to be used where intensive support is being delivered to households who have been accommodated in dispersed accommodation or purpose-built units in order to help maximise the success of such support. They can be offered by a council or housing association landlord in circumstances where the tenant is likely to be evicted on the grounds of anti-social behaviour or in the opinion of the landlord could have been so evicted and to support the provision of behaviour support services. These tenancies normally last between 6 months and 1 year. In certain circumstances they can last for up to 2 years. Family Intervention Tenancies are secure or assured and as such they are terminable on notice with no need to prove any grounds for termination or possession. If a landlord offers a household a Family Intervention Tenancy, it does not however have to accept it. However it may be advantageous for a tenant to accept a Family Intervention Tenancy as an alternative to being taken to court for possession of their home.
- 3.4 A Family Intervention Tenancy will give the Council an additional option with which to work with families who have been involved in anti social behavior.
- 3.5 Members are therefore asked to approve:
- The addition of the Family Intervention Tenancy to the Council's Tenancy Policy.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 Stakeholder engagement has informed the recommendations made in this report.

¹ 'Tenancy Survey' (Inside Housing, January 2013)

² 'Helping troubled families turn their lives around' – DCLG, February 2013

5.1 Resource Implications

5.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

6.0 Other Implications – Environmental, Human Rights, Community Safety

6.1 There are no environmental, human rights or community safety implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 Youth and Anti-Poverty

7.1 Helping people to be better able to manage changes to their income and the support they may or may not receive from the Social Security system is a positive way of combating poverty.

8.0 Equality and Fairness

8.1 Add comment

9.0 Conclusion

9.1 The way the Council's ability to discharge its duties as both a strategic housing authority and as a landlord needs to reflect the wider circumstances in which these roles are delivered. This includes being able to adapt to changes in national policy as well as local circumstances. The recommendations in this report allow the Council to respond equitably to these external influences.

Lead officer name: Andy Thompson BA MSc

Job title: Strategic Housing Manager

Background Papers: None