

## HOUSING PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S MEETING

THURSDAY, 1 AUGUST 2013

### DECISIONS

Set out below is a summary of the decisions taken at the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on Thursday, 1 August 2013. Decisions made by the Portfolio Holder will be subject to call-in. Recommendations made to the Cabinet or to the Council are not subject to call-in. The wording used does not necessarily reflect the actual wording that will appear in the minutes.

If you have any queries about any matters referred to in this decision sheet please contact Ian Senior.

#### 1. **ASSET MANAGEMENT POLICY (NOT FOR CALL IN)**

The Housing Portfolio Holder recommended to Cabinet (for onward recommendation to Council if necessary) the adoption of the new Housing Revenue Account Asset Sustainability Policy (Disposals and Acquisitions) attached as Appendix A.

**Options Considered:** The Housing Portfolio Holder may wish to approve this policy for recommendation to Full Council as it appears in Appendix A. The Housing Portfolio holder may wish to approve the policy for recommendation to Full Council with identified changes to be included. The Housing Portfolio Holder may wish to reject the policy and retain the current arrangements. Appendix B sets out a comparison of the proposed new policy with the existing policy arrangements.

**Reason For Decision:** The new policy is necessary to ensure that the Council is able to operate an efficient asset management approach with regard to the Housing Revenue Account and in particular support the development of new homes in a commercial environment.

#### 2. **UNDER-OCCUPANCY POLICY**

The Housing Portfolio Holder approved the 'Under-occupation Policy' as set out in Appendix A.

**Options Considered:** Many organisations have introduced a range of measures in response to the welfare reform changes to help households downsize. These range from support and advice on organising the move to significant financial incentives paid to tenants to move. Organisations paying financial incentives tend to have a shortage of larger social housing in their area, for example Cambridge City Council who pay up to £1000 per move whether people are in receipt of housing benefit or not. Other organisations just support those households in financial hardship and affected by welfare reform changes/reduced housing benefit and this is the option we recommend.

Cambridge City Council carried out their own research recently which found that only around a third of households who downsized were influenced by the financial incentive to move. This supports National Housing Federation research carried out in 2011 which found that only a relatively small proportion of households were influenced by financial incentives in their decision to downsize. The research found that other factors are equally important such as providing support and information to those people wanting to downsize, helping organise removals or ensuring the property being offered was in good condition/in the right location. This is demonstrated in a recent case study attached at **Appendix B**.

At present we have discretion to help fund removal costs via housing management or Discretionary Housing Payment budgets where there is evidence of financial hardship. We would like to expand this scheme on a discretionary basis to offer a wider range of support services/incentives which will be tailored to individual needs from the list below:

- Organise and pay for removals costs through a local approved contractor.
- Time to hand in keys for the old property – up to 2 weeks tenancy overlap rent free on the old property.
- Organise additional cleaning and/or decorating of the property the tenant is due to move to (above the basic void standard).
- Payment towards rent arrears at existing property to help facilitate move and prevent transfer of former tenant debt to new property.
- Organise and pay for a room/s to be carpeted or for someone to take up and relay carpets in the new property.
- Help with organising the move or paying for change of utilities or appliances e.g. disconnection and reconnection of gas appliances.
- Help with organising or paying for any other reasonable costs associated with the move.

This proposed scheme is in recognition that one solution will not fit all. Some people may have savings to pay for the move but would have difficulty organising contractors to move possessions, disconnect and reconnect appliances or decorate a property. Other people may simply not be able to afford any additional expenditure.

These outline proposals are detailed in the attached policy document Appendix A, together with other options available to assist tenants affected by the welfare reforms, such as taking in a lodger, support in finding employment and money advice, etc.

**Reason For Decision:** The introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 has led to cuts in the amount of housing benefit working age tenants receive if they are deemed to be under-occupying a rented property. A range of support options are available to tenants faced by these changes. This policy seeks to ensure a consistent approach is adopted by the Council when dealing with cases of under-occupation and benefit reductions.

### 3. **BASSINGBOURN: DISPOSAL OF GARAGE SITE OFF MILL LANE**

The Housing Portfolio Holder agreed in principle that the site be offered for sale to the purchaser of the adjacent pub site at the price of £30,000 plus legal costs, for use as a parking and garden area to serve a new pub on the pub site, subject to planning permission and an uplift clause. Existing rights of way over the site to be retained. (Option One).

**Options Considered:** Option One – Offer the site for sale to the purchaser of the adjacent pub site at the price of £30,000 plus legal costs, for use as a parking and garden area to serve a new pub on the pub site, subject to planning permission and an uplift clause. Existing rights of way over the site to be retained. Option Two – Place the site for sale on the open market at development value. Option Three – Consider developing the site for new Council housing.

**Reasons For Decision:** The site is surplus to Council requirements. There is local support for a new pub on the adjacent pub site and this would benefit from the use of the garage site as an ancillary parking and garden area. There is local opposition to the use of the garage site for new housing.