



North Tyneside Council

# Briefing note

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**To:           Housing Sub Committee**

**Author:     Katrina Anderson, Homefinder Manager**  
**Becky Dodds, Housing Strategy and Development Officer**

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**Title:        Review of North Tyneside Councils Lettings Policy**

## **1. North Tyneside Council's Letting Policy**

It is best practice to review Lettings Policies every two years. The last review of North Tyneside Council's policy was in 2013 and is now due for review again, particularly due to the rapidly changing policy context, including the Localism Act which allows greater control over the suitability of prospective tenants, Welfare Reform and the strategic direction of the Council (Creating a Brighter Future).

The existing policy is working well. In 2014-15 over 1,100 applicants were re-housed, including 63 applicants from Band 1, 482 applicants from Band 2, 408 applicants from Band 3 and 206 applicants from Band 4.

However, across the sector the demand for social housing is greater than supply. The Lettings Policy provides a pivotal role in finding a balance in the competing roles of Social Housing that is right for North Tyneside – 'meeting need, contributing to sustainable communities and offering choice.'

## **2. Aims and Objectives of Lettings Policy**

To help people access secure, suitable and affordable homes within North Tyneside, the Authority will:-

- Work with our Registered Provider Partners and Private Landlords registered with the Authority, to ensure that people seeking a home or those who need to move from their current home, have as much choice as possible over where they live.

- Be an effective partner in the Tyne and Wear Homes Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme, to enhance opportunities for existing tenants to move homes within our own Borough and between that of our Tyne and Wear Partners.
- Recognise the support needs of vulnerable people and work with organisations providing care and support, in order that they can access the help they need and where relevant provide help for them to stay in their own home or obtain support in moving home.
- Meet the requirements of the two primary Housing Acts, 1985 & 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation and statutory guidance on social housing allocations.
- Promote equalities in our service to help ensure that no customer or potential customer is unjustifiably treated less favourably on the grounds of religion, age, gender, marital status, ethnic or national origin, colour or disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity or gender re-assignment.

Our Lettings Service is designed to: -

- Offer as much choice as possible to applicants.
- Provide a fair and transparent system in which people receive the correct priority for housing.
- Support and assist customers to understand how the service works, in order that they can access and use the service.
- Create more sustainable communities, as people who exercise choice over where they want to live are more likely to want to stay there.
- Make efficient use of our resources and those of our partners

### **3. Issues to be considered as part of 2015 Lettings Policy Review**

The 2015 Lettings Policy Review is looking to address a number of emerging issues and to consult on the following proposals. Further details on each of these will be provided as part of the presentation to Housing Sub-Committee.

#### **a) Local Connection**

North Tyneside's homes are in high demand, we are exploring options which would allow the Council to give greater priority to those with a local connection to the Borough, while keeping an open housing register and supporting our sub-regional choice based lettings scheme.

#### **b) Owner Occupiers**

As part of the review, we are trying to achieve a more robust, transparent and fair process for assessing whether such applicants 'have equity' but which facilitates home owners moving into North Tyneside Living Schemes &/or bungalows.

### **c) Affordability**

As part of our commitment to tenancy sustainment and to meet the challenges of Welfare Reform (including the lowering of the benefits cap and abolishment of automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18-21 year olds), we are seeking to introduce an affordability test.

### **d) Restricting Refusals**

Around 53% of all offers made are refused by applicants. This places significant pressure on resources. Within the review we are exploring the possibility of introducing a 'penalty' where an applicant refuses a number of properties within a period of time.

### **e) Community Contribution**

The Localism Act allows provision for giving priority to those who make a positive contribution to the local area, for instance through working or volunteering in the Borough – we are seeking views as to whether this is something Members and the public would like to see introduced to North Tyneside's Lettings Policy.

## **4. Next Steps**

- a) Consultation with Members, external stakeholders, Service Development Group and wider public (Nov – Jan)
- b) Cabinet Approval (March)