

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 29 November 2019	Meeting Name: Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Modernisation
Report title:		Pre-allocation of all new build accommodation policy	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Housing and Modernisation	

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the cabinet member for housing management and modernisation approves:

1. The inclusion in the council's allocation scheme of the proposed pre-allocation lettings process for new build affordable homes set out in this report.
2. The proposed process takes effect from 1 January 2020.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Demand for Social Housing (Council and Housing Association Housing) in Southwark far outstrips supply. There are currently over 10,500 households on the Housing Register, which is about 9% of all households in the borough. In the 24 months leading up to 31 December 2018 there were only 2,835 lettings and during the 1 January 2019 to the 30 September 2019 period only 882 affordable homes have been allocated in Southwark. It is clear affordable housing lettings are reducing every year and this trend is anticipated to continue in the future.
4. To help meet this need the council is building 11,000 new council homes by 2043 and has also set a requirement that private developments in the borough must provide at least 35% affordable housing of which at least 75% must be council or housing association homes. The council is also actively calling on national government to provide the investment in council housing needed to fully meet this demand. However building these homes will take time and as such demand for council and housing association housing in Southwark will continue to be much higher than the supply throughout the life of this policy.
5. This means that for most applicants the solution to their housing needs will not be met via the Housing Register. The council will therefore work with applicants to look at alternative ways of meeting their housing needs, through the provision of housing advice, assistance and support.
6. However, for those applicants who will be successfully re-housed through the housing allocations scheme it is essential these applicants feel empowered to make decisions which will enhance the quality of their life, improve the families educational attainment, allow the applicant to feel part of the Southwark community immediately and build inclusive self-supporting neighbourhoods.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

7. It is now proposed that the pre-allocation of new build Southwark Council and Housing Association accommodation takes place going forward from 1 January 2020.
8. New build affordable housing will be advertised through the Choice Based Lettings scheme on the tenth week from the date the new build development work commenced. This will allow applicants to select accommodation to meet the needs of the applicant at a much earlier time in the letting process.
9. The new build development teams at Southwark Council and all Housing Association partners will be expected to provide the full details of the scheme being developed to the Housing Solutions service on the tenth week from the commencement of the development work.
10. This information will be the standard information currently used to advertise all properties through the Choice Based Lettings scheme, and there will be no difference in the allocation of these new build homes compared to the re-letting of existing affordable homes.
11. Once the Housing Solutions service advertises the new build properties, the Housing Solutions service will provide the list of successful applicants who have been offered the new build properties to the new build development teams on the eleventh week of the new build development cycle.
12. The new build development teams at Southwark Council and the various Housing Association partners will then liaise with the applicants directly relating to the homes they have been allocated.
13. The new build development teams will then empower the successful applicants to select, if possible, the following:

A choice of four colours in kitchen and bathroom for:

 - Kitchen worktop
 - Kitchen tiles
 - Kitchen units
 - Kitchen flooring
 - Kitchen walls
 - Bathroom floor colours and paint colours for the walls.
14. The successful applicant will not be allowed to make any changes to the structure of the property (any necessary adaptations to the property due to mobility requirements will be permitted) or works to be undertaken within the communal areas.
15. This new way of working will allow the council to treat residents as if they were a valued member of our own family.
16. The council will be open, honest and accountable for all decisions reached in this area of our work.
17. It will demonstrate that the council is empowering applicants and spending money as if it were from our own pocket.

18. This work will empower applicants and allow everyone to realise their potential, through this important policy framework.
19. This pre-allocation of all new build affordable homes will make Southwark a place to be proud of.
20. On the completion of the new build development all applicants will be asked to comment on the process to ensure improvements are continually made to the allocation of all new build homes and reviews are conducted on a regular basis of this policy framework.
21. It will be essential for the development teams to keep in regular contact with the successful applicants in order to keep these households informed of any delays and progress with the new build development.
22. It will also be essential for the local community to be advised of the new build housing allocations process during the design and planning application process to ensure no one from the local community misses out on the opportunity of being re-housed due to the pre-allocation of these new build homes. This consultation will be led by the new build development teams.
23. The new build development teams will also advise the local elected members of the progress with all new build developments on a regular basis.
24. The Housing Solutions service will need to verify the applicant's details before the applicant signs the tenancy agreement to ascertain if there have been any changes to the applicants housing need, family composition etc.
25. For those applicants who have had a change of circumstances since the original offer of the new build home on the eleventh week of the development cycle, a review of the applicants needs will be conducted through the normal verification framework.
26. If it is discovered the applicant's circumstances have changed and it is no longer possible to allow the applicant to sign the tenancy agreement then the Housing Solutions service will advise the applicant of this decision. The applicant may request a review of this decision and the head of housing solutions service will lead on any and all reviews.
27. For each new build development, consideration will be given to putting in place a local lettings scheme. These schemes will be designed by the Housing Solutions service in partnership with the local elected members, the local community and the new build development teams. All local lettings schemes will be approved in accordance with the council's decision making arrangements in the constitution.
28. In the council's current contracts we do not place a requirement on the contractor to provide for resident choice. Therefore, the council will need to discuss this matter immediately with the contractors and amend the contracts and framework going forward to allow this resident choice on all future new build schemes.
29. Also for developments that the council purchases this resident choice approach may not be possible, in particular if the purchase is late in the development phase.

30. The housing solutions service will continuously review the implementation of this new procedure in partnership with the relevant elected members, the cabinet member for housing management and modernisation and all services across the council to ensure lessons are learnt and improvements adopted going forward.
31. The Housing Solutions service will liaise with the cabinet member for housing management and modernisation and relevant local ward members throughout the development process to ensure there is an accountable and transparent framework in place.

Policy implications

32. There are no negative policy implications relating to the adoption of this new policy framework. The new procedure will empower applicants and allow everyone to realise their potential, through this important policy framework. This framework will comply with the council's published housing allocations scheme, and the homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy.

Community impact statement

33. This new way of working will allow the council to treat residents as if they were a valued member of our own family.
34. The council will be open, honest and accountable for all decisions reached in this area of our work.
35. It will demonstrate that the council is empowering applicants and spending money as if it were from our own pocket.
36. This work will empower applicants and allow everyone to realise their potential, through this important policy framework.
37. This pre-allocation of all new build affordable homes will make Southwark a place to be proud of.

Resource implications

38. There are no new resources implications connected with the implementation of this new policy framework. The existing resources will be adequate to implement and manage this policy framework.

Consultation

39. The proposed pre-allocation process set out in this report has been the subject of consultation with officers internally. Consultation with Southwark residents and others has not been carried out as the proposed process does not involve a major change of policy.
40. Each local lettings scheme proposed will be the subject of a consultation with residents and members, and an equalities impact assessment.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Democracy

41. Under section 166A(1) of the Housing Act 1996 local housing authorities must establish an allocation scheme for determining priorities between qualifying housing applicants and for the procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation. The council has an allocation scheme in place.
42. The report proposes a pre-allocation process in respect of new build properties be included in the council's allocation scheme.
43. When preparing or modifying schemes, local authorities must have regard to their homelessness and current tenancy strategies and in the case of London housing authorities, must also have regard to the London Housing Strategy.
44. Section 166A(13) of the 1996 Act requires a housing authority to afford all registered providers of social housing and registered social landlords with whom it has nomination arrangements the opportunity to comment on an allocation scheme before it is adopted or before it is altered in any way that reflects a major change of policy. 'Major change of policy' is not defined in statute although government guidance for local authorities in England suggests that any amendment affecting the relative priority of a large number of applicants, or a significant alteration to procedures would engage the statutory requirement to consult. It is not considered that the pre-allocation process proposed in this report engages the statutory consultation requirement, because it does not represent a significant alteration to procedures.
45. The cabinet member's attention is drawn to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which requires the council when carrying out its functions and when making decisions to have regard to a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, (b) to advance equality of opportunity and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. The relevant characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The duty also applies to marriage and civil partnership but only in relation to (a). The cabinet must give consideration to equality issues when taking a decision on the recommendations in this report.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

46. The strategic director of finance and governance notes the recommendations to adopt a pre-allocation lettings policy. As noted in the report, there are no financial implications of implementing this policy framework.

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Richard Selley, Director of Customer Experience	
Report Author	Ian Swift, Head of Housing Solutions service	
Version	Final	
Dated	27 November 2019	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		27 November 2019