



**Report to the Safer and Stronger
Communities Scrutiny & policy development
Committee
26th March 2014**

Report of: Jasper South

Subject: Implementation of the Allocations Policy

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Summary:

The information presented has been requested by the Committee to provide an update on the implementation of the new policy.

The new allocations policy was agreed by Cabinet in March 2013 and authority was delegated to the Executive Director for Communities to –

- Draw up a scheme of authorisation for Allocations Policy decision making prior to implementation;
- Fully implement the new policy at the point when the necessary updating of the Choice Based Lettings Information technology system is completed, with full implementation expected to be 1st April 2014

Full scoping of the requirements for implementation have now been considered with recommendation to extend timescales and budgets to ensure an effective implementation.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	√
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Comment on progress to date

Background Papers:

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Sponsor of Allocations Policy Implementation

Progress of implementation

1. Introduction/Context

- 1.1 An update on the progress of the allocations policy implementation has been requested by the committee.
- 1.2 The new allocations policy was agreed at cabinet in April 2013, with an initial commitment to implement by April 2014. This report outlines the activities undertaken since cabinet agreement, and highlights the reasons for the requirement to delay implementation

2. Main body of report, matters for consideration, etc

- 2.1 Following agreement at cabinet of the new policy, it was quickly established that it would be essential to ensure the new Choice Based Lettings web site (CBL) was implemented and embedded prior to making further large scale changes for staff and customers. The CBL project was commenced in 2011 and originally planned to go live in April 2013. The new CBL web site was fully implemented in October 2013, following this and subsequent learning a comprehensive assessment was undertaken to establish the scale of changes required to successfully implement the new policy. It was reported to the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods in November 2013 that implementation by April 2014 would not be possible due to the extent of the further IT system changes, procedural work and change management required to deliver the new policy on top of the implementation work for the new Choice Based Lettings system.

Further work has been completed to fully assess the resources and timescales to complete implementation of the policy effectively.

Timeline

The implementation timeline has been scoped and planned, again based on the learning from the CBL implementation and a realistic timeline for full implementation of the revised policy is 18 months, the main reasons for this extended timeline are:

- The initial scoping in 2012 was not informed by full knowledge of the IT issues
- Based on learning from CBL the IT changes need to be fully developed, delivered and tested, which will require a minimum of 9 months

- All new processes require mapping 3 months either side of the 9 months IT changes
- Training plans and scripts need to be developed and delivered
- To reassess all applicants and allocate to the correct new band is a much more intensive task than originally envisaged and will take approximately 3 months

Budget

Before completion of the review and agreement of the final policy the cost of implementation was initially estimated at £140,000. Now more detailed understanding is available this sum is insufficient.

To put this in context, this figure was a 'rough cost' estimated in December 2011 before the new policy had been finalised, with limited knowledge of the IT and process changes required. These figures have now been revisited to take account of:

- The final policy being agreed and understanding what this means for implementation
- The outcomes and legacy from the implementation of the CBL project
- The requirement for a dedicated staff team
- Level of support required for customers

Summary of estimated costs

Activity	Cost
Advertising and communications	£40,409
Support for customers at 'go live'	£36,168
Abritas and IT changes (estimated)	£60,000
Project team staffing	£108,528
Documentation scanning	£3,600
Re assessment of applicants	£27,300
Sub total	£276,005
Contingency 20%	£55,201
Total	£331,206

The contingency is in place to account for the following:

- Unknown IT system change costs
- Any additional customer support, communications or advertising that may be required
- Any other unforeseen cost

A project board and dedicated project manager are in place to lead the implementation which is proceeding to plan. However it should be noted that a number of risks remain that could affect the implementation, and these will be closely monitored with remedial action taken where necessary to keep the project on course.

3 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

3.1 Impact of the New Policy for Housing Applicants

The policy review focused on seven key challenges and led to changes that affect customers as follows –

	Issue	Impact for Customers	Implementation Date
1	Bedroom Size Eligibility	More restrictive eligibility with less scope to bid for accommodation with “spare bedroom”	April 2013
2	Choice Based lettings	CBL retained with an enhanced system for better customer information and access	October 2013
3	Bidding	Bids restricted to 3 per week – with better information about properties and outcomes	October 2013
4	Age Designation	More options for younger applicants, end of 40+ designations and review of all 60+ designation	September 2014
5	Priority Banding	Assessed for one of three priority bands so more urgent housing need leads to quicker rehousing	June 2015
6	Registration	Required to provide more information up-front including references, and keep their registration updated annually. Customers with poor tenancy history will be unable to register or have reduced preference	June 2015
7	Adapted Properties	More flexibility to allocate directly, making it easier for disabled customers to access the most suitable properties	June 2015

It can be seen from the table that a number of the key changes proposed in the new policy have been implemented, or will be before the full implementation of the new policy. It was agreed that changes to eligibility rules would apply from April 2013, to align with changes to Housing Benefit entitlement with the introduction of the bedroom tax. Other changes are being introduced, where possible, in advance of implementation of the full policy.

Implementation later than anticipated may mean that the policy is affected by changes in statutory guidance or the local housing market. It is proposed to establish a mechanism for a standing review of the policy so that it is reviewed on a regular basis and can be updated more swiftly in response to changes. Delays to the implementation mean that some of the expected benefits will not be achieved as soon as originally expected. The Equality Impact Assessment for the project is being revised to take account of this.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress made so far and comment on the progress to date