

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	29 June 2022		
TITLE:	Removal of Age Criteria from Council Housing Stock		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Emberson	PORTFOLIO:	Housing
SERVICE:	Housing Needs	WARDS:	All
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates on the position agreed in March 2018 at Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee to remove the age criteria from the Council's general needs housing stock (non-sheltered) and seeks approval to replace the remaining aged designated properties with local lettings policies where appropriate.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee approve the removal of age criteria from the remaining age designated general needs housing stock (non-sheltered) and replace with local lettings policies where it is appropriate to do so.
- 2.2 Where local lettings policies are required to replace age criteria, they will be developed in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and Ward Councillors

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Distinct from sheltered housing, the Council has set age designations on a number of its general needs properties. Nearly 1,000 general needs homes (predominantly in blocks of one bedroom flats and studios), covering 65 separate addresses/roads, historically had such restrictions; about a third were reserved for people aged over 50 and the majority of the rest for over 60s. It is important to note that most of the properties did not make up entire roads but were only a small proportion of properties in these areas.
- 3.2 These designations were set over twenty years ago and were not formally documented at the time. Officers consider it most likely that they had been introduced as an attempt to address problems with neighbour disputes (for example because of noise or lifestyle differences) between older tenants and newer, younger tenants.
- 3.3 Whilst the Council recognises that incompatibilities may still arise between different tenants, practice has developed so that segregating residents in general needs properties solely based on age is not considered a practical or effective way of addressing these. It can unfairly discriminate against younger tenants seeking an affordable place to live and introduce tenants who although they qualify by age have

no priority for housing or due to historical issues are not compatible with the tenants already in residence. The Council has effective services in place to support tenants and address any issues or neighbourhood disputes, but these are better managed if this is taken into account at the point when an allocation is made to an appropriate property.

- 3.4 Age restrictions have a significant inadvertent impact on the way Council properties are allocated where age designations do not match the most pressing demand pressures, many are allocated to applicants assessed as having no priority for housing.
- 3.5 In March 2018 Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee noted and approved the recommendations in the report Housing Services for Older People. [HNL Committee 14 March 2018 Item 13 \(reading.gov.uk\)](#) One of the recommendations approved was to: *Remove the age criteria that are attached to some Council homes and amend the Allocations Scheme, introducing options designed to promote sustainable communities whilst maintaining a fair system of allocating new tenancies.*
- 3.6 The principle to be applied was to replace age-designations with local lettings policies, making properties available to those in most need and to amend the Council's Allocations Scheme to substitute ad hoc 'sensitive lettings' with the following broader principles:
- Where specific properties are especially suited for people who are frail or have limited mobility (for example, level access or with adapted facilities) they should be let on the basis of need for this type of accommodation. Whilst this is likely to be predominantly older, frailer, people it will not exclude younger applicants with an accessibility need.
  - Where blocks of homes have been designated as for over 60s/50s and properties have been consistently let to over 60s/50s, replace the age restriction with a local lettings policy reducing the risk of incompatibility with new tenants.
  - Where blocks of flats already have a number of tenants of all ages despite the age-designation and this has not resulted in any housing management concerns, remove the age designation.
- 3.7 A large proportion have been let in this way with over 80% of the age designated blocks already having people aged below the designation living in them. Properties have eventually been let to younger tenants who present no management issues where no one of the specified age has expressed an interest when the property was advertised. Tenancy successions, and tenants who live together with younger partners have contributed to this number. In addition, where properties have been sold through the right to buy the Council has no influence over the age of the occupants in these homes.
- 3.8 There has been less use however of local lettings policies to replace age criteria. Local lettings policies as set out the Council's Allocations Scheme offer the facility to apply local letting criteria and restrict lettings for example to prevent issues of anti-social behaviour or other such behaviour or introduce age criteria should it be required.

#### **4. THE PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 The proposal is to complete the removal of age criteria for all general needs properties and for those areas that require interventions to build a more balanced and sustainable community, implement local lettings policies. This will allow properties to be available for those most in need whilst protecting those that are most vulnerable. The local lettings policies will include criteria that is specific to the issues in a local area by ensuring that suitable letting is carried out in a more targeted way, focusing on the specific needs of individuals and communities.

- 4.2 Where there is a need to actively promote community cohesion and sustainability within neighbourhoods through tenancy allocation decisions. Additional terms, for example checking for any incidents of antisocial behaviour, can be added and subsequently reviewed where appropriate. With a changing demographic, age alone is not an indication as to whether a tenant will be the perpetrator of anti-social behaviour or neighbour nuisance. This approach allows for flexibility to introduce local lettings policies should issues or concerns arise in other blocks not previously age designated in order to protect older people within our communities.
- 4.3 The Allocations Scheme was reviewed and approved by Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee in November 2021. The new Scheme has broadened the scope of local lettings policies in order to help better manage concerns within communities.
- 4.4 Where local lettings policies are required to replace age criteria, they will be developed specific to the needs of individual blocks and will take into account the views of the Lead Councillor for Housing and Ward Members.
- 4.5 Local lettings policies will be regularly reviewed, normally annually, to ensure their ongoing effectiveness and to determine whether they are still required.

## **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 5.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is:

*To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.*

- 5.2 The proposal supports Thriving Communities. The information detailed in this report sets out the principal of making best use of the Council's housing stock whilst ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected and that our communities are sustainable.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There will be no environmental and climate implications as a result of this proposal

## **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 7.1 The Allocations Scheme review consulted on broadening the use of local letting policies to support sustainable communities. Whilst there is no requirement to consult with residents on this change to our working practice, the Council did consult on the changes being proposed to the Allocations Scheme, under the general theme of building sustainable communities and broadening the use of local lettings policies.
- 7.2 Where local lettings policies are required to replace age criteria, they will be developed in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and Ward Councillors

## **8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed regarding the decision to remove the age criteria from the Councils general needs housing stock, as approved in March 2018 at Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee. It was determined that the removal of the age criteria would have no negative impact on any group and assumed the implementation of individual local lettings policies which are kept under review enable more equitable housing allocations than the blanket age criteria allows.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Council has the legal power to change its practices and policies in this way and the proposal is acceptable.

**10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this proposal. Currently there is a risk of rent loss due to the hard to let nature of age restricted accommodation and this proposal will reduce those risks.

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1 Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee Report March 2018: Housing Services for Older People [HNL Committee 14 March 2018 Item 13 \(reading.gov.uk\)](#)

