

Minutes of Strategic Housing Working Group

Meeting Date: Wednesday, 29 November 2023, starting at 1.00 pm
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chairman)

Councillors:

J Atherton
S Atkinson

R Ray
M Robinson

In attendance: Director of Economic Development and Planning, Head of Strategic Planning and Housing and Strategic Housing Officer

Also in attendance: Lyndsey King, Elaine Barrow, Nicola Tomlinson and Tracy Grayson from Onward Homes.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY, OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON-REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interests

3 REVIEW OF RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL'S ALLOCATION POLICY

Powerpoint presentations were provided to the working group by the representatives from Onward Homes (slides contained at appendix 1) and the Housing Strategy Officer HSO (slides contained at appendix 2).

The HSO detailed the importance of the allocation policy on both a strategic and operational level.

It was noted that it is the responsibility of the Council to hold a waiting list, but Onward Homes manages the list on the Council's behalf.

The HSO outlined the current registration process under RVBC allocation policy. Currently, anyone can apply to be placed on the waiting list, regardless of whether they have a 'housing need' or not. The HSO confirmed that going forward, it was important to make sure that people's needs are correctly reflected on the list. Discussion took place as to the people who are currently on the list and it was outlined that some have aspirational goals (they want to live in a specific type of property in a specific locations), rather than needing a property. The Strategy Officer did state that if a person is deemed to have unreasonably refused a property then their application would be frozen and they wouldn't be offered another property for a set period of time.

Lyndsey (Team Leader of Onward Homes) outlined an alternative Choice Based Letting (CBL) system, which was being used in other areas in East Lancashire and is called 'B-With-Us' (see appendix 1). Under this system there are four bands of 'housing need'. In order to be allocated to a band, a person needs to demonstrate their housing need and the band they are placed in depends on their situation. If there is no housing need then they would go into band 5. People in each band are placed in date order of when their application was made. It was further clarified that if a person's circumstances

change and they change bands, then the effective date becomes the date of any band change.

People are then able to bid for available properties that meet their needs. It was clarified that this is not a monetary bid. This means that a person is only applying for a property that they want and that is suitable for them. The CBL system allows them to look on line at all the details of the property and see photos of the property and outdoor space. Therefore people are making a much more informed decision when they bid for the property.

Under RVBC's current policy, when a property becomes available, a considerable amount of time is spent going down the waiting list to find someone who it is appropriate for and who wants it. Some people have to be excluded as they are frozen and some people turn down properties. Furthermore, under the current policy, RVBC award points for what would be determined as 'no housing need', housing situations as shown below. This leads to a situation whereby households with no housing need can be relatively high on the waiting list. Lyndsey outlined the volume of applications that Onward Homes are managing for RVBC.

Councillor Atkinson felt that the policy needed to be realistic and should reflect those with actual housing needs, rather than a mere desire to move. Councillor Ray felt that most people on the list would be 'in need' but the Onward Homes team did not think this was always the case as highlighted by the number of properties refused.. It was confirmed that quite a few older people in the Borough are on the list without having any housing need and some examples were provided. Of the 99 deferred applications, 69 of these were over 65 years old.

It was noted that if RVBC removed the applications which have been determined as not meet the 'housing need' criteria, the current numbers on the waiting list would reduce by around 250. Therefore important all households on the list are consulted.

The HSO advised that she thought that a band system would help those who are 'sofa surfing', as they would be placed in a higher band. She also confirmed that higher levels of homelessness were being seen, particularly given the changes with EPC's requirements, meaning that there are less private rented properties.

The HSO advised that if the Council moved to a choice-based letting system (akin to B-With-Us) people would only be able to bid for properties that they were eligible for and it would create a more efficient system. However, it would be a huge change and a new system would need to be purchased, which would have financial implications.

Discussion took place as to whether there was an option somewhere in between what RVBC had now and the choice-based system.

The HSO outlined the proposed key changes to the allocation policy (see appendix 2) and confirmed that this would need to be taken to Health & Housing Committee for approval. Members were of the view that the choice-based option should also be put to the Committee for Members to consider.

The representatives from Onward Homes left the meeting.

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UPDATE ON LONGRIDGE COMMUTED SUM SPEND

The HSO advised that there was a meeting scheduled the following week to go through the Heads of Terms for the legal agreement for the grant.

ASSISTED PURCHASE SCHEME

The HSO advised that the further legal information required before the scheme could be implemented, was still outstanding. It was specialist legal advice that is being sought.

Discussion took place surrounding alternative options and Members questioned whether the Council could look at purchasing additional units/property. This would be a possibility, but decisions would have to be made as to where to purchase (bearing in mind where the s.106 monies had been received from) and who would manage the property.

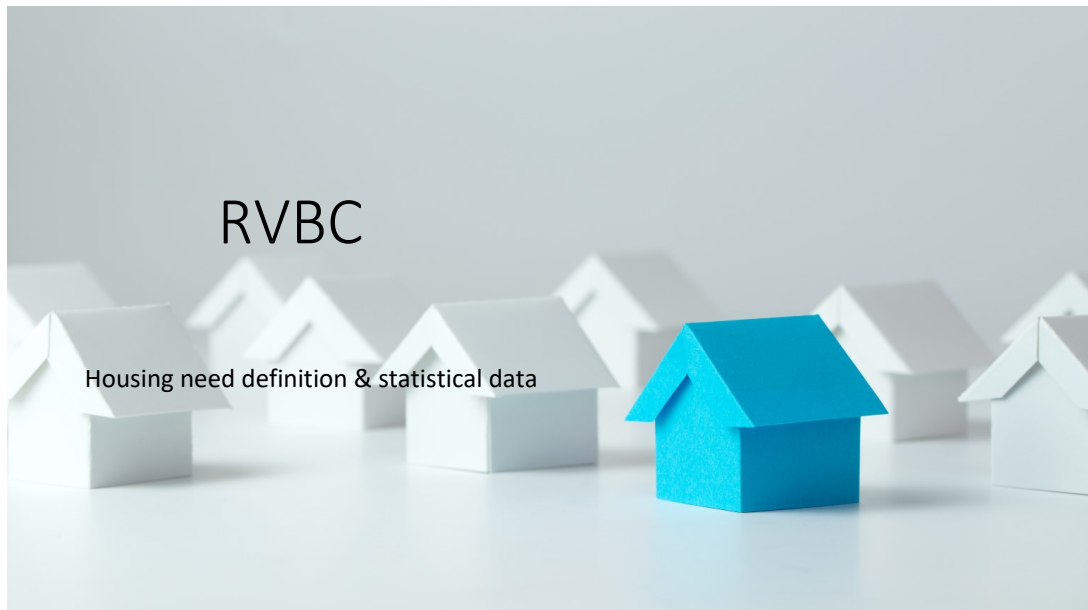
It was further discussed that in relation to the Chipping contributions the Community Land Trust may be able to assist in delivering something.

At this stage, Officers would consult further with the Legal department for further advice. It may be that an alternative option could be taken to the next Health & Housing Committee for consideration.

The meeting closed at 2.32 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Jenny Martin jenny.martin@ribblevalley.gov.uk.

Appendix 1 (Onward Homes Powerpoint slides)



Housing Need as defined by CBL

B-With-Us has 4 bands of 'Housing Need'

Band one

Homelessness – full statutory duty

Urgent medical need to move – life threatening/progressive illness. Severe disability or illness preventing them from using facilities in their current home. Awaiting discharge and cannot reasonably return to their current home.

Living in unsatisfactory conditions/prohibition order

Partner Organisation demolition/regeneration

Care leavers



Band two

Duty to help prevent homelessness

Duty to help relieve homelessness

Insanitary housing and the Local Authority has served a notice

Disability – current home unsuitable to make adaptations to (OT referral)

Risk of harm – DA, hate crime, residing in a refuge or safehouse

Band three

Homelessness – no duty

Needing to move to prevent hardship – to commence employment/education. To give or receive support.

Medical need to move – a diagnosed medical condition affected by their current home / whose disability impairs them to live in their current home.

Overcrowded

Sharing facilities with non-family members

Band four

Partner organisation transfer – Under-occupied by one or more bedrooms

Current RVBC allocations policy – no 'housing need' points

Residency points

Aged over 70

Anniversary points/registration points

Current RVBC policy with 'Housing Need'.

Homelessness – full duty.

Prevent or relieve homelessness.

Overcrowding / underoccupied.

Living in a violent or dangerous situation

Harassment.

Ready to move on/leave supported accommodation/care leavers.

Victim of domestic abuse

No facilities – hot water, heating, serious disrepair.

Medical need.

Number of lettings

2023/24 - YTD

Onward – 67
Nominations - 50

2022/23

Onward – 80
Nominations – 86

2021/22

Onward – 88
Nominations – 89

2020/21

Onward – 105
Nominations - 60

2019/20

Onward – 104
Nominations – no data

2018/19

Onward – 119
Nominations – no data

Volume of applications

Current volume – 704 active applications. 99 deferred applications (803)

July 2023 – 795

July 2022 – 955

July 2021 - 964

Review of RVBC Allocation Policy

Nov 2023

Allocation Policy – strategic level



Provides evidence of need



Provides information of the need for house types and tenure



Informs RP's in the borough of the demand levels

Allocation Policy – operational level

Method of organising priority

How we allocate stock

Ability to provide nominations

Process of registration



Provide ID



Evidence eligibility



Evidence local connection



Complete application and detail your housing need

Prioritising housing need

If you are homeless or under immediate threat

Difficulties in your current home

Family circumstances

Condition of your current home

Your health is at risk by living in your current home

Proposed key changes

- Only eligible if you are in current housing need
- Local connection can be retained if you leave the borough through lack of affordable housing for 12 mths and then reviewed.
- Increase hIn points
- Change the level of rent arrears detail
- Changes to medical points
- Update eligible and non eligible applicants