

# Minutes of Strategic Housing Working Group

Meeting Date: Thursday, 29 February 2024, starting at 1.30 pm  
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chairman)

Councillors:

J Atherton

S Atkinson

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

## 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R Ray and M Robinson.

## 2 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023 were approved as a correct record.

## 3 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY, OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON-REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

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

## 4 CONSIDERATION OF THE REFORMS TO SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

The Chief Executive had received a letter asking for RVBC's views to the Government's consultation on reforms to social housing allocations. This related to proposed changes on a national level which it was envisaged would take some time to implement. RVBC would continue with the current review of the Allocation Policy at a local level.

In particular, the Government's consultation sought views on the following issues:

1.The introduction of a United Kingdom (UK) connection test, to ensure that it is those with the closest connection to the UK who are eligible for a social home;

2.Mandating the following tests: local connection test, income test, false statement test, and tests for anti-social behaviour and terrorism offences;

3.The introduction of a new ground for eviction for those who are convicted of terrorism offences, and implementation of a 'three strikes and you're out' policy for anti-social behaviour.

The working group considered the proposed UK connection test, with particular discussion surrounding whether one of the eligibility rules i.e. having been lawfully resident in the UK for a continuous period of ten years, was appropriate. The period of ten years was felt by some members to be too long. The Housing Strategy Officer did flag up that this timescale was not part of any other housing test and that it did not fit in with homelessness legislation.

It was noted that RVBC do currently implement a local connection test for social housing, but the length of the test is currently set at 12 months.

The working group felt that with regards to an income test for applicants, the threshold should vary depending on the locality and that it should be set by the local housing authorities.

Discussion took place as to whether income data should be assessed at household or individual level. The concern was that, as children get older and secured jobs this could push a household over the limit. However, the children may not contribute towards housing expenditure. Whilst it was noted that RVBC currently assess on household income, the working group felt that the income data should be assessed on the basis of whoever is on the tenancy agreement.

As per one of the consultation questions, the working group felt that if the household income was based on the two highest earners working full time, the income cap should be set at £50,000 - £59,999. This would be in line with RVBC's current policy whereby the cap is set at £60,000 for a household.

It was further agreed that capital assets should be included in the assessment.

On balance, it was felt that households should be exempt from an income test where an individual is either:

- In receipt of Universal Credit, Housing benefit or other legacy benefit
- A member or veteran of the UK armed forces

The working group agreed that there should be a new qualification test that would disqualify social housing applicants who have unspent anti-social behaviour convictions or civil sanctions in the area where the anti-social behaviour was committed.

Similarly, they agreed that those who have an unspent conviction for a terrorist offence, should be disqualified from social housing eligibility.

These comments will be reflected in the consultation response.

## 5 UPDATE ON THE LONGRIDGE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUTED SUM SCHEME

The Housing Strategy Officer had met with Onward Homes prior to Christmas and recently with the Council's legal department to give further consideration to the Heads of Terms of the Grant Agreement. Going forward, there will be discussions as to the payment dates of the three tranches.

The legal department had also advised that provision should be made for monitoring of the site six months before each payment is due to be made. Therefore, in September 2024 RVBC would want to see what is happening on site. Then, in the event that deadlines are not being met, it would give RVBC the opportunity to implement other options.

It was noted that officers would be meeting again with the legal department and with Onward Home to get the grant agreement signed.

## UPDATE ON PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO DFG PROCESS

The Housing Officer provided an update as to the proposed changes to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process and advised that there is a plan to commissioning a private Occupational Therapist (OT) to clear any waiting list of Ribble Valley residents waiting for a LCC OT assessment.

Whilst it was noted that the Better Care Fund district allocations are being considered at the moment, some local areas want there to be a reallocation of the BCF in Lancashire and concerns were raised as to how this could affect RVBC. The importance of measuring the impact of how many people are able to remain living independently in their homes due to the DFG was stressed.

The Housing Strategy Officer advised that RVBC are potentially looking at widening the DFG grant offer and there was discussion as to the benefits of home safety assessments.

The meeting closed at 2.20 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Jenny Martin .