

**Housing and Community Safety Policy
and Scrutiny Committee**

11 October 2022

Report of the Director of Housing Economy and Regeneration

York's approach to the housing waiting list and vulnerable groups 22/23

Summary

- 1 This paper updates the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Committee on the current situation with the York Allocations Policy.

Recommendation:

- 2 Scrutiny is asked to note this information and asked to make comment and recommendations on the issues raised.
- 3 Reason: To update the Committee on the York Allocations Policy

Background

The City of York Allocations Policy

- 4 City of York Council (CYC) went live with its own standalone housing allocations policy on the 4 April 2022. After it was agreed that CYC would withdraw from the North Yorkshire Home Choice partnership, the policy remains a choice based letting scheme, but because we stand alone it enables CYC to be more flexible in its approach to housing vulnerable people and meet the ever-changing needs of York's citizens. The leaving of North Yorkshire Home Choice also involved going live of a new housing IT system called Open Housing.
- 5 Link to allocations policy

<https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/7784/city-of-york-council-housing-allocations-policy>

Full version annex A

The aims and objectives to be achieved by this policy are:

- Meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002, Localism Act 2011 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- To encourage and support balanced and sustainable communities.
- To make the housing process, fair, easy to use and transparent.
- To give applicants realistic information about the availability of social housing across the City of York Local Authority area and work with them to look at all their available housing options.
- To prevent homeless and reduce placement in temporary accommodation.
- To ensure accessibility for all those in housing need, particularly the more vulnerable

Care leavers

- 6 As a vulnerable group young people with experience of care leavers are given emergency band when they are ready to be rehoused. They are put forward by the children's social care pathway team when ready to move on to independent living, as part of housings corporate parenting commitments, following work to ensure that they are ready. There are also 'trainer' flats available so they can test out independent living before committing fully.
- 7 The Head of Housing Management has been attending the Corporate Parenting (CP) Board to feedback on improvements to the Housing offer in the context of CP. A housing protocol for young people with care experience is being developed through this. This includes embedding existing arrangements around care experienced young people (YP), the creation of a YP housing discussion group to make moving on as successful as possible. This involves the YP. Emergency band offers the highest priority on the housing register to ensure that any property offer is timely.

Resettlement

- 8 Resettlement includes the following vulnerable groups; rough sleepers, single homeless people, homeless young people, people with severe and enduring mental health issues and offenders.

- 9 Resettlement works with these vulnerable groups in a person centred and planned to way to stabilise any issues that may have contributed to a person finding themselves homeless and helps build the skills required to move into independent living. Gold band is offered to these groups which is high priority. Gold band priority banding is also backdated to the exact date someone began the re-settlement process. By giving a backdate, City of York Council are offering further priority to those coming through the resettlement route relative to other people who are in gold band with less 'time in band'.

Homeless

- 10 The statutory homeless route is a legislative process which is determined by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17). The HRA17 ensures that everyone is entitled to Advice and Assistance. The Housing Options Team carry out an assessment of the applicants housing situation to determine if any further duty is owed in accordance with the Act. We work to try and prevent homelessness and where unsuccessful, relieve homelessness (relief duty). During the Relief Duty, Gold band can be awarded to applicants who fall into the priority need category and are also eligible, have a local connection and have not caused their own homeless situation. If we are unsuccessful in relieving a person's homelessness and they meet the criteria to be owed a further "Main Duty" we provide temporary accommodation and would make a directed offer to house them as soon possible whilst still allowing them to bid on the Housing Register in Gold Band. A pragmatic approach is taken to ensure people are offered permanent accommodation as swiftly as possible and are not in temporary accommodation for any longer than necessary.

Housing First

- 11 In an ever changing and increasingly complex world, Housing First offers bespoke packages of accommodation and support to very vulnerable people, often with multiple complex needs and who could be described as entrenched rough sleepers with chaotic lifestyles. These can include people with some of, or all of the following vulnerabilities: entrenched rough sleeper, mental health issues, substance misuse, ex-offenders, young people.
- 12 Gold band is offered and there is no prerequisite for someone to make changes; however, they must have a willingness to abide by the rules of the tenancy agreement given that the property allocated will be from our (or a housing partner's general needs stock. The whole process is customer led and allocation of properties are strategically planned via a panel, which

includes all services involved with the individual's bespoke support package, aiming to ensure tenancy sustainment, stabilisation and mitigate any risks. The majority of allocations of these properties are done through direct offers.

Offenders

- 13 The Offender initiative is for those who have previously had a CYC/RSL tenancy and if eligible are placed in emergency band and rehoused upon release from prison, A tenant who is sent to prison for longer than 13 consecutive weeks can apply and bid on properties 4 weeks before they are released from prison or can receive a direct offer' upon release from prison. Provided they gave up their tenancy promptly on their imprisonment, there were no rent arrears or damage to the property, no anti-social behavior related to the conduct of their tenancy, and they satisfy an acceptable behavior test on their release.

Health and well being

- 14 Health and wellbeing awards on the housing register offer higher priority to applicants based on their health and well-being linked to their housing need. Gold band can be offered under health and wellbeing.

Older people

- 15 There are several housing options for the elderly as a vulnerable group that can be offered via the housing register, these include extra care, Independent Living Communities for those aged over 60 or 55 for social registered providers. Our Older Person Housing Specialist works with elderly applicants that require extra care, and those unable to return home from hospital as their current accommodation is no longer suitable.
- 16 The Housing Registrations manager attends major adaptation panel for those that need considerable adaptations in the current home and then works with Occupational therapists to look for ways to find alternative accommodation.

Current overview of the York allocations Open Housing register end of September 2022

Waiting list total	937 households
Emergency band	10 households

Gold Band	191 households
Silver band	519 households
Bronze Band	217 households
Application backlog	262 households

1 bed need	560 households
2 bed need	176 households
3 bed need	156 households
4 bed need	37 households
5 bed need	7 households
6 bed need	0 households
7 bed need	1 household

New housing developments

- 17 88 Registered social providers properties have been let with 15 new build one beds and 5 x 2 bed new build bungalows at Germany Beck via the York system. More properties will need allocation as further completion phases are completed.
- 18 Lowfield's - allocations consist of 28 homes: 3 x one bed apartments, 2 x two bed apartments, 6 x two bed bungalows, 11 x two bed houses, 6 x three bed houses.
- 19 Future developments are at Ordnance lane, Burnholme, Duncombe Barracks and the Coco Works all with mixed tenure and property sizes
- 20 The City of York Council standalone policy allows for a more bespoke and flexible arrangements if appropriate for applicants in the form of Discretionary moves for vulnerable customers that need to move urgently that sometimes just don't fall under the allocations policy, we can now offer to place on the bidding system or a direct offer where no bidding is required. These are done working alongside support and care providers and internal and external agencies to ensure that people receive adequate support, care and assistance to maintain accommodation.

- 21 While all the above is very positive the numbers reflect a grim outlook when it comes to meeting the needs of those who require social housing with these numbers reflecting that there is a distinct lack of social housing in York where demand outstrips supply. This creates a tinderbox of frustration for applicants some of which spills out towards the staff in housing registrations and housing options teams who are tasked with explaining these limitations to applicants and managing their expectations. This can be further compounded by the expectations of other non-housing services or others involved with applicants in terms of over aggressive advocacy. Which is very challenging for the team and requires careful management to maintain staff morale.

Young Persons pathway

- 22 Howe Hill supported accommodation for young people offers a pathway of housing related support and accommodation for young people 16-25 and for teenage families. In partnership with our youth homeless workers in housing options and children's social care and Pathway team, this facility offers training and education, with a gradual tiered approach to permanent accommodation using gold band in the allocations policy as a resettlement category.

Direct Offers

- 23 Applicants can be granted a property allocation without the need to bid on homes in exceptional circumstances as set out in the policy. This mechanism is used for specific situations such as where someone's council home is subject to demolition or where Housing First with a support package has been agreed (see the policy for the full list).
- 24 It is also used where an applicant's circumstances are such that it is felt to merit an urgent move. This is usually with input from a range of agencies such as police, local area co-ordination, Children Services, Adult Service, Mental Health, Community Safety Unit etc.
- 25 These offers would come within this section of the allocations policy:
'Any other management case where the issue is of a specialist nature including assisting Social Services and housing management and/or emergency'

Current Direct Offers pending 30.09.2022:

1 bed need – 21

- 2 bed need – 1
- 3 bed need – 2
- 4 bed need – 3
- 4-5 bed need – 2

Sensitive lets

- 26 Within the policy is the ability to apply a 'sensitive let' criteria to a vacant home. This is particularly relevant to flats within a block and usually occurs where there has been serious anti-social behaviour at the property in question which has had a long term detrimental impact on neighbours or the local community. This could be drug dealing for example. This approach allows for an extra level of vetting to be carried out before an allocation is made to any individual or family to help ensure that the tenancy runs smoothly and the situation within the immediate area improves.
- 27 Care is taken to limit criteria to those relating to the problem. CYC work in conjunction with North Yorkshire Police and all potential applicants/tenants are policed checked prior to being made an offer.

Mental Health housing worker post

- 28 Joint work is being undertaken between housing and adult social care to embed this post in the Pathway to Recovery team. This existing post has been reviewed across services and will act as a conduit between adult social care, housing and mental health trust (TEWV) to ensure an applicant with severe and enduring mental health issues is adequately supported through the housing routes with appropriate care and support in place.

Personalisation

- 29 Our approach, which is being developed over time, is to ensure support and help is as personalised as it can be, taking in to account additional issues or vulnerabilities for example LGBTQ+ issues, to ensure people can, as far as possible, be adequately and safely housed. All staff in housing undertake a range of regular mandatory training including safeguarding and LGBTQ+ awareness

Work with Local Area Coordination (LAC)

- 30 Staff across housing work closely with LAC across the city who identify vulnerable individuals and walk alongside them using a person centred approach. In some cases, we will work outside of the Allocations policy. Senior LAC also have the authority to 'verify' information on behalf of people they are working with so that the need for formal documentation from e.g., mental health or primary care is not needed as this can be a barrier to working towards a better life. This has proved to be a very positive approach with excellent outcomes for customer/clients across the city.

Perpetrator / victim flags

- 31 We are developing ways to track victims and perpetrators to try to avoid people being re-traumatised because of allocations. This is logistically very difficult given the numbers of people involved and the imperfect information and systems for doing this. We use simple flags on filing systems, appropriate notes and multi-agency working currently and are looking at ways to use the Open Housing system to improve this over time.

Mental Health Housing and Support

- 32 Housing are currently working with Adults, Health, TEWV and a range of partners to develop a specialist mental health resettlement pathway and supported accommodation for people with enduring mental health issues. The original intention was to build 2 cluster units of self-contained flats and to have a range of independent fully supported housing first homes linked to these. The approach is currently being reviewed following an unsuccessful procurement exercise to find partners who would build and manage the cluster units as well providing the support.

Implications

- 33 None Identified.

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Report
Approved



Date

03/10/2022

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexe

Annex A – Full York Allocations Policy