



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET - 6TH JANUARY 2020
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM (9)
Subject	CONSULTATION ON REVISED HOMESEAKER PLUS POLICY
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr. Lisa Spivey - Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness. Email: lisa.spivey@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Jon Dearing - Group Manager for Resident Services Tel: 01993 861000 email: jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk
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Summary/Purpose	To advise of the consultation of the revised Homeseaker Plus Policy.
Annexes	Annex A - Proposed main changes to Homeseaker Plus Policy Annex B - Proposed Homeseaker Plus (revised) Policy
Recommendation	<i>That the Cabinet approves the revised Homeseaker Plus Policy for consultation purposes.</i>
Corporate priorities	Ensure that all services delivered by the Council are delivered to the highest standard. Help residents, businesses and communities to access the support they need to ensure a high level of health and wellbeing.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Portfolio Holder Chief Finance Officer Head of Paid Service Monitoring Officer Senior Management Team

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1.** The Council is a member of the Homeseeker Plus Partnership which comprises the six 'district' local authorities within Gloucestershire (Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Stroud District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucester City Council) and West Oxfordshire District Council. The Councils work in partnership with social landlords to provide affordable homes for people to rent. Properties from these housing providers are advertised on the Homeseeker Plus website, through which applicants can then apply for them.
- 1.2.** The purpose of the Homeseeker Plus Allocations Policy is to explain who is eligible to apply for affordable housing and how their housing needs will be assessed. This assessment must be in line with relevant legislation and the statutory code of guidance on the allocation of accommodation, as these set out how applications will be assessed in a fair and transparent way based on housing need.
- 1.3.** Following the recent implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (the Act), it is now considered timely to review the current Homeseeker Plus Policy. This report highlights some of the key changes that the Council will be seeking to consult on. Following consultation, relevant approval will then be sought to adopt any agreed changes.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1.** Homeseeker Plus enables social housing landlords to advertise their homes on the Homeseeker Plus website, and applicants are able to express an interest in them. This is known as placing a "bid" for a property. Once a bid is placed, the system will generate a shortlist, placing applications in order of: band, band start date and whether they meet the criteria of the advert. Priority for properties goes to those in the highest band, and then to people who have been waiting the longest within the band. Priority is also initially given to people who have a local connection with the local authority in which the property is located, followed by those who have a local connection with any of the other Homeseeker Plus districts, and finally to anyone else.
- 2.2.** The recent implementation of the Act has introduced a wider focus for local authorities on preventing homelessness for everyone. The Act emphasises working in partnership with a wider range of organisations and housing providers and changes need to be made to the Homeseeker Plus policy to ensure it reflects the aims of these legislative changes.
- 2.3.** It has also become apparent that the Homeseeker Plus policy is open to interpretation and can be implemented differently across the partnership. It is therefore recommended that the Council provides greater clarification within the policy to ensure consistency throughout the partnership.
- 2.4.** The Homeseeker Plus Partnership supports a number of the Council's key corporate priorities. The proposed policy changes will provide greater consistency over how the policy is interpreted across the districts, whilst ensuring that we make best use of our affordable housing provision in terms of meeting local housing need.

- 2.5. This review also gives the Council an opportunity to conduct a review of the Homeseeker Plus Policy more generally, and to consult on a number of proposed changes and additions to the scheme.
- 2.6. Each of the Local Authority partners will need to gain approval from their individual Cabinets to consult on the proposed changes. It is anticipated that this will be finalised by mid-January 2020; allowing the consultation period to begin in early February 2020. The consultation will be open for a period of eight weeks.
- 2.7. The consultation will seek views from all interested partners and residents. All current applicants will be contacted via their application and the link will be available on all council websites and advertised through social media.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The requirements for consultation are governed by the overriding duty of public authorities to act fairly in the execution of their functions.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. There is a risk that implementing the policy without consultation could lead to successful challenges via judicial review.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are no specific implications in relation to climate change

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. Not to update the Homeseeker Plus policy - however it is proposed this option is rejected for the reasons given in Section 2 above. The Homeseeker Plus policy needs to be reviewed to ensure it reflects the aims of recent legislative changes and that clarification is added to ensure that the policy is applied more consistently throughout the partnership

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1. None

(END)