



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16 November 2023

Report of Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

Housing Options Workshop feedback

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to give feedback on the questions and enquiries raised at the Housing Options members workshop on 19th October 2023.

Recommendations

The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the feedback from the Housing Options Workshop held on 19th October 2023.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?

No

What are the relevant corporate priorities?

Housing that meets the needs of all residents
Healthy and strong communities

Which wards are impacted?

N/A

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

1.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Completed by: Alison Hall-Wright, Deputy Director (Finance and ICT) and Deputy S151 Officer

Legal and Governance

1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implications arising from this report which is to provide the Committee with an update on the outcomes of a recent workshop.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director, (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer

2. Background to the Report

2.1 The following points were raised during the workshop for feedback. This feedback can be seen below:

2.2 **Councillors requested a staffing list with contact numbers and pictures.**
This is attached with this report.

2.3 Confirmation of distribution of settlement from Urban Hotel was requested.

As of May 2023 when the 3 month notice was served, there were 31 families resident in the hotel These families were resettled across the UK as follows:

- 10 left the hotel to stay with family (none in SKDC)
- 13 were offered accommodation across the UK from the Home Office (all outside SKDC)
- 8 were moved into private rented accommodation (only 1 family remained in the SKDC area)

2.4 Distribution of slides from the homelessness workshop was requested, and these are appended to this report.

2.5 Details of Ukrainian Emergency Provision additional staff member in place, funded by Lincolnshire County Council. SKDC is able to help with the upfront costs of private rental accommodation. In addition, a family can access £1000 to furnish property when sourced. As each family has been granted a temporary visa, they are able to access homelessness support and assistance.

2.6 Details of a Mental Health Assessment: vulnerability guidance is enclosed. This is guidance given to officers to guide them through the assessment of priority need based on the question of 'is the applicant vulnerable as a result of....'.

2.7 Details of homelessness Out of Hours support/referral: - there is 24 hours out of hours emergency line using the number 01476 590044. SKDC has a rota system which means there is always an officer on call to deal with emergency homelessness approaches.

2.8 Clarity of priority need of those under 18 and care leavers: Under 18s are classed as priority need under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

In relation to care leavers, the homelessness code of guidance states the following:

- a person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 and 18 (except a person who is a 'relevant student');

Care leavers must have been in care between the ages of 16 and 18 to be classed as priority need before they turn 21.

2.9 Clarity on local connection criteria. The homelessness code of guidance states the following:

Assessing local connection

When a housing authority makes inquiries to determine whether an applicant is eligible for assistance and owed a duty under Part 7, it may also make inquiries under section 184(2) to establish an applicant's local connection.

Section 199(1) provides that a person has a local connection with the district of a housing authority if they have a connection with it because:

- (a) they are, or were in the past, normally resident there, and that residence was of their own choice; or,*
- (b) they are employed there; or,*
- (c) they have family associations living there; or,*
- (d) of any special circumstances.*

There was a particular mention of family connection. The code of guidance states the following:

For the purposes of (c), where the applicant raises family associations, this may extend beyond partners, parents, adult children or siblings. They may include associations with other family members such as step-parents, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts or uncles provided there are sufficiently close links in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. Family associations should be determined with regard to the fact-specific circumstances of the individual case. For example, the actual closeness of the family association may count for more than the degree of blood relation. A housing authority should not identify a local connection through family associations with an area other than the one where the applicant positively wants to live.

- 2.10 **Information requested on the current oldest homelessness case** – The oldest case was opened on 25 July 2022, and is an extremely complex case. The individual has been placed in multiple emergency accommodation settings. They are a wheelchair user with complex drug and alcohol misuse and mental health issues.
- 2.11 **Can someone claiming single occupancy discount on council tax offer a spare room as a temporary arrangement without affecting the discount?** If the person staying at someone's property is liable to pay council tax elsewhere, or classes another address as their main and sole residence, then the single person discount would not be affected. However if this is not the case, then the single person discount could be affected. The Council would need to assess each case on its own merit.
- 2.12 **Details requested of the Armed Forces Covenant and priority/exemption confirmation:**

The armed forces covenant is a commitment by the government that people who have served in the armed forces along their families should not be disadvantaged due to their service.

In the Council's Housing Allocations Policy, there are 2 areas where there are specific criteria applied to this cohort:

1. Exemptions to Local connection criteria:

Armed Forces personnel - Certain members of the Armed Forces community are exempt from any residency / local connection requirements, by virtue of regulations made under section 160ZA (8) which prevent local authorities from applying a local connection test to disqualify such applicants. These are:

- a) Those who are currently serving in the Regular Armed Forces or who were serving in the Regular Forces at any time in the 5 years preceding their application for an allocation of social housing*
- b) Bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the Regular Forces where
 - (i) the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased, or will cease, to be entitled to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation following the death of their Service spouse or civil partner, and*
 - (ii) the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service**
- c) Serving or former members of the Reserve Armed Forces who are suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is wholly or partly attributable to their service*

2. Additional Preference

The following applicants will be given additional preference over other applicants who are within the same Band:

- Applicants who are former serving members of the regular armed forces*
- Applicants who are serving or former serving members of the regular armed forces or reserve forces who suffer from a serious injury, illness or disability sustained as a result of their service.*
- Applicants who are a bereaved spouse/civil partner of a former serving member of the regular armed forces and have recently ceased (or will soon cease) to be entitled to reside in services accommodation following the death of their spouse/civil partner*

This means that whatever band they are placed in on the housing register, they will be listed top of that band regardless of the time they have been waiting on the register.

2.13 **Councillors requested to meet the Change 4 Lincs (C4L) team.** This has been noted and officers will arrange this meeting.

2.14 **Request for the number of active C4L cases in SKDC.** There are currently 17 active cases, including sofa surfers and those moved on who require support.

- 2.15 **Number of applicants on the register who are pensioners.** 330; however please note that this is taken from the old register. An update would be provided once the new register is fully established.
- 2.16 **Number of applicants on register who are single households.** 558; this number is taken from the old housing register. An further update would be provided once the new register is established.
- 2.17 **Allocations by band:**
1st April 22 – 31st March 23
238 lets of which:
- 98 Emergency band
 - 65 Band 1
 - 37 Band 2
 - 6 Band 3
 - 30 Band 4
 - 2 Band 5
- 2.18 **Councillors to get a copy of communications related to Choice Based Lettings** – this is attached to the Choice Based Lettings agenda item
- 2.19 **Review communications on the subject of Choice Based Lettings** – the Housing team will review future communications taking on board previous feedback received from Councillors.
- 2.20 **Review the households who do not re-register to make sure those showing as high priority aren't missed.** Housing officers can run reports to check this and if necessary re-engage those who have not applied for new system.
- 2.21 **Key contacts** – provided in the attached contact list
- 2.22 **Domestic Abuse training for Councillors** – Housing officers to arrange this in due course.
- 2.23 **Night stop Scheme.** Housing officers to contact the Member that requested this.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The feedback is contained within section 2 above.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 N/A

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 Feedback was requested from the Housing Options Workshop held on 19th October 2023

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1: Housing Options Spotlight presentation slides
- 6.2 Appendix 2: SKDC Housing Options contacts
- 6.3 Appendix 3: Vulnerability guidance
- 6.4 Appendix 4: 1st Advisory letter, Choice based lettings
- 6.5 Appendix 5: 2nd Choice based lettings letter
- 6.6 Appendix 6: Choice Based Lettings Q and A