

# **Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 3 July 2008**

**Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan**



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**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext 4246**

**Subject: De-designation of Properties from Older People's Occupation**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers the current policy of de-designating properties on housing estates from older person's occupation, (which have proved difficult to let to this client group), and allocating to younger applicants.**

## **Background**

1. Following some concerns raised by Members about the numbers of properties, formerly designated specifically for occupation by older people on housing estates, being let to younger people, the Housing Portfolio Holder has asked for this report to be submitted to the Panel for consideration.

2. During the mid 1980s, the Council designated around 1,300 properties as specifically suitable for older people due to their size, type and location. Such properties are exempt from the right to buy. A list of the properties designated at that time is attached at Appendix One. It is important to note that these properties do not include sheltered housing for older people which would not be de-designated from older persons use.

3. In the late 1980s, the former Housing Committee agreed that 118 properties be removed from the list as they had proved unpopular with older people, at a time when there was a growing need for small flats to be let to young married couples. In 1990, a further 58 properties were removed from the list, since there was a significant lack of demand, often having to be offered to older applicants who had only one point under the old points system of allocations.

4. On 30 October 1991, following consideration by the former Working Group on Housing, Housing Committee agreed that the then District Health and Housing Officer be given delegated authority to "de-designate" properties previously considered specially suitable for older people, where they cannot be let to older people. The Working Group on Housing noted that this was due to Housing experiencing difficulties letting such properties, with the result that they remained vacant, losing rental income, for unacceptable periods of time, when they could be let to general needs applicants, from whom there is a high demand.

5. More recently, when vacancies occur, designated properties for older people have proved even more difficult to let to older applicants. Under the old system of allocations, up to 10 offers were made and refused by this client group, resulting in void times increasing.

6. Officers have carefully considered (in accordance with Member delegations) which properties should remain designated for older people's use. A current list of all designated older people's properties on housing estates is attached at Appendix Two. As can be seen, there are fewer properties designated compared to the original list. As a result, far less properties are now being de-designated.

7. Following the introduction of the HomeOption (Choice Based Lettings) Scheme in November 2007, designated properties for older people are advertised in the fortnightly free-sheet and on the website seeking expressions of interest from applicants aged 60 years or over. In some cases, no expressions of interests have been received, not even from older applicants in the lowest Band. Moreover, many applicants who do express an interest often refuse the offer of accommodation, extending void periods.

8. If any properties on the new de-designated list prove difficult to let to older applicants after appearing in one edition of the free-sheet, a standard letter is sent to all applicants in the lowest bands (5 and 6) advising them of the opportunity of possibly being successful should they express an interest. If no interest is expressed in the subsequent free-sheet, then the age limit is reduced by 5 years from 60 to 55 years of age and so on until it is let.

9. The Council currently has 3,995 applicants on its Housing Register, of these 386 (9.7%) are applicants over 60 years of age with 1,581 (40%) being younger applicants wanting one-bedroom accommodation. These statistics support the Council's decision to de-designate appropriate flats originally set aside for older persons use, bearing in mind that, of the total number of those on the list awaiting one bedroom accommodation, 75% are younger applicants. If the Council left such properties empty awaiting interested older applicants, it would increase the already unacceptably high void periods further, ignoring the ever-increasing demand from younger applicants.

10. The Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the current policy of de-designating properties on housing estates from older persons use, and provide the Housing Portfolio Holder with any comments.

### **Consultation**

11. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation was consulted at its meeting on 20 May 2008, and agreed that the Council has no alternative but to de-designated older people's accommodation on housing estates where no older applicants express an interest in the accommodation.