

HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

Thursday, 9 September 2021 at 6.30 p.m.

Supplementary agenda.

3 .3 Housing Allocations Audit Report and Intermediate Housing

PAGE
NUMBER(S)
5 - 14

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Presentation to Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee on Housing Allocations Audit Report

Page 3

9 September 2021

Rafiqul Hoque - Head of Housing Options
and John Harkin - Team Manager,
Assessment and Attainment



Agenda Item 3.3

Introduction and Background



- The audit was undertaken as part of the 2019/20 Internal Audit Plan approved by the Audit Committee in March 2019
- The audit involved an examination of the systems and controls in place for assessing, approving and prioritising applications to the Housing Register, and resulting lettings, in order to ensure that decisions taken are in accordance with Council policy and statutory guidance
- Final report was published in March 2021
- The report resulted in a limited level of assurance for the Lettings Service



Examples of good practice



- Applicants from the Housing Register are matched with their needs and priorities in accordance with Council Policy.
- All application forms contained a completed declaration of truth
- All application form received dates were recorded accurately onto Housing SX3 system
- Segregation of duties was undertaken by the officer who formulated the bid to the officer who approved it.
- All successful applicants tested had a tenancy file created on Comino

Page 5



Risk 1



- Applicants may join the housing register without providing the required documentation, which could lead to an increase in fraudulent or otherwise inappropriate applicants on the register

Page 6

- **Our Response**

- We have introduced a checklist for officers to complete prior to accepting an application which confirms all documents have been provided
- Team Principals are carrying out random spot checks quarterly to ensure adherence



Risk 2



- Without detailed checks on income, home ownership or history of bad behaviour applicants can join the housing list and obtain a property fraudulently or otherwise inappropriately
- **Our Response**
- Applicants have to provide their latest P60 to confirm income
- Checks carried out to confirm reasons for leaving previous addresses where applicant has lived at their current address for less than three years. Forms are returned if the question is not answered.
- Greater use of Credit Checking Agencies to discover links to other properties



Risk 3



- Lack of regular reviews could lead to offers being made inappropriately and distorts true figure of those in housing need

• Our Response

- Our IT systems are being updated to enable automated reviews
- We are checking our Housing Register against the National Fraud Initiative Database. Over 300 applications have already been cancelled
- We have applied to join DWP 'Tell us Once' programme so we are informed when applicants pass away



Risk 4



- Lack of robust checks built into the system
- **Our response**
- We have introduced a detailed, mandatory checklist for officers to complete before applications are accepted confirming that applications have been checked thoroughly
- Team Principals will be carrying out spot checks to ensure checklists are being completed.



Risk 5



- Failure to review non bidding applicants
- **Our Response**
- Although there is nothing in our current Allocations Scheme that requires applicants to bid regularly, we have started a review of applicants who have never placed any bids.
- This will be followed up by a review of all applicants who haven't bid for over 5 years
- We will also start 3 monthly reviews of all Health and Management cases in Band 1 Group A.



Risk 6



- Some officers had not updated their declarations of interest leading to a risk that management are unaware of any conflicts that may arise in order that they can control and monitor the situation
- **Our response**
- All officers have updated their declarations of interest



Moving Forward



- Team Principals will continue to undertake bi-annual spot checks
- Making greater use of Credit Checking Companies
- Staff training on Fraud Awareness
- IT upgrade to include automatic review function

