

Local Lettings Initiative

Area covered by Local Lettings Initiative : Loudoun House, Butetown

Implementation date : 1st October 2014

Next Review Date : November 2018

Legislative setting

The statutory basis for 'local lettings initiatives' is set in section 167(2E) of the 1996 Housing Act. This allows for an Allocation Scheme to include policy priorities other than those specified in legislation provided that:

- they do not dominate the scheme; and
- overall, the scheme operates to give reasonable preference to those in the statutory reasonable preference categories over those who are not.

Local lettings initiatives can be used to support these locally identified priorities and can be applied to certain types of property or those within a specific area.

Background

Under the Council's Allocation Scheme dated November 2010 households including children were not eligible for high-rise accommodation. The Council's **two bedroom** general needs high-rise flats were therefore offered to couples or single people if there was no other applicant whose housing needs they more closely met – resulting in underoccupation.

In response to the introduction of social housing size restrictions for Housing Benefit in April 2013 the City of Cardiff Council introduced a financial affordability assessment where a formal offer of a property larger than a household needs is made. This restricts the number of applicants qualifying for 2 bedroom high-rise flats resulting in a situation where such flats are becoming 'hard to let'.

The Council's Allocation Scheme approved by Cabinet in December 2013 supports the use of local lettings initiatives, and states that :

- All high-rise units in the city will be subject to local lettings initiatives, set to achieve sustainability. Where such Initiatives allow the accommodation of families with children, the child/ren must be aged 8 or over.
- Where an applicant or their partner has regular child access but no other children living with them, they will be considered for flats and maisonettes only (including high-rise properties, subject to any local letting initiative).

Loudoun House

The proposal to pilot a local lettings initiative at Loudoun House (to allow families with children aged 8 and over to be offered highrise accommodation) followed analysis of waiting list statistics and consideration of all highrise blocks in the city. Anti-social behaviour records for high-rise flats indicated that low level and sporadic ASB is experienced in all blocks. However Loudoun House is the only block with a Concierge service to assist in on-site management and monitoring of any new arrangements, and early identification of any associated issues. Housing Benefit records show that there are already 22 children resident in Loudoun House, and this is the only general needs high-rise block in the city without balconies.

Legal advice was sought and consultation was undertaken with Loudoun House residents, Ward members, and partner Housing Associations. Responses were received from 72 residents, approximately 78% of whom were supportive of the proposal to house families with children aged 8 or over in the block.

Aims of the Local Letting Initiative

Choice & sustainability

Cardiff Council aims to build mixed, sustainable communities and to give applicants as much choice as possible about where they want to live.

There are a total of 159 x 2 bedroom properties in Butetown (North & South) but, apart from one parlour house, all are flats – 117 being in Loudoun House. As households with children under the age of 8 are not offered low-rise flats above first floor, and households with children of any age are not currently eligible for high-rise properties, the accommodation available to families with a 2 bedroom need in the area is very restricted. Records showed that 684 households were registered on the Common Waiting List for 2 bedroom accommodation in Butetown (North & South), but only 135 of these would be considered for 2 bedroom high-rise accommodation.

107 of the households waiting for 2 bedroom accommodation in Butetown lived in the area; it was the first choice area for 69% of these (compared with only 9% of the applicants from outside the area). However, the limited availability of 2 bedroom **family** accommodation in the area restricts the possibility of applicants with children being offered suitable local accommodation. This has implications for community sustainability.

Making best use of stock & minimising voids

Social housing is in short supply and the Council aims to make the best possible use of available properties. Restricting offers of highrise accommodation at Loudoun House to households without children makes it more difficult to identify suitable applicants from the waiting list who would not be under-occupying the 2-bedroom accommodation.

For 2 bedroom high-rise (non-retirement) flats in Butetown, the average void time was double that for non-high-rise flats of the same size; and twice as many offers were made in order to achieve a let.

This local lettings initiative aims to address these issues by extending the opportunities for offering flats at Loudoun House to families who meet the criteria set out below.

Criteria

Applicant Criteria

Under this Initiative properties that become available at Loudoun House may be offered to applicants :

- who have chosen Butetown as one of their preferred areas for accommodation
and
- who have a 2 bedroom housing need (in line with current Housing Benefit size criteria)
and
- whose household does not include a child under the age of 8 (and is not expecting a child)
- whose household does not include more than one child

Offers will be made to applicants identified from the Common Waiting List in line with the current Allocation Scheme and the above criteria, bringing the letting of highrise flats in Loudoun House in line with lowrise 2 bedroom flats in the city. This will ensure that reasonable preference is afforded to the groups specified under legislation when letting these properties.

Under this pilot local lettings initiative a refusal of an offer of highrise accommodation by a household including a child aged 8 or over will be treated as a 'reasonable

refusal'. The refusal will not affect the number of further offers they are made, or their situation on the Common Waiting List.

Operational criteria

- This local letting initiative will be effective from 1st October 2014
- The initiative will operate for one year in the first instance, after which it will be subject to formal review. This review will be led by the Assistant Director for Housing & Communities in liaison with Ward Members for Butetown, and tenants' representatives. The review will determine whether the initiative should be amended, terminated or extended.
- Interim monitoring reports will be produced quarterly including information on the number of offers made for each available property, the reasons for refusal, and the number of resulting lets (with details of household make-up for all offers, refusals and lets); vacant rates; vacant turnover times and incidents of anti social behaviour. These statistics will be made available to Ward Members for Butetown.
- Ongoing monitoring of child density at Loudoun House will ensure that a density of 40% of flats accommodating children is not exceeded. Should this density be reached consideration will be given to whether the local letting arrangements should be discontinued, amended, or remain unchanged.