

# PLEASE NOTE VENUE

## REGENERATION, LIVEABILITY AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO DECISION SCHEDULE



**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006**

**at 2.00 pm**

**in Classroom 2, Belle Vue Community Sports and Youth Centre, Kendal Road**

The Mayor Stuart Drummond responsible for Regeneration, Liveability and Housing will consider the following items.

**1. KEY DECISIONS**

1.1 Joint Allocations Policy Review – *Director of Neighbourhood Services*

**2. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

2.1 Headland Environmental Improvements 2006/07 Croft Gardens – *Head of Neighbourhood Management*

**3. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

No items

**4. REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW OF SCRUTINY FORUMS**

No items

# **REGENERATION, LIVEABILITY & HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

Report To Portfolio Holder  
18 December 2006



**Report of:** Director of Neighbourhood Services

**Subject:** JOINT ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW

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## **SUMMARY**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To recommend amendments to the Joint Allocations Policy following a thorough review of the policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and complies with all legislative requirements, in particular the introduction of Choice Based Lettings before the Government's target of 2010.

### **2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS**

Cabinet first considered this report at their meeting of 25 September 2006, at that time Members decided to defer any decision until they had the opportunity to fully consider and discuss the recommendations. A seminar was arranged for 7 November 2006 and Members were provided with a detailed presentation of Joint Allocation Policy Review. Members expressed their full support for the recommendations made and particularly welcomed the proposal to develop a Vulnerable Persons Panel to coordinate and monitor the allocation of supported housing and floating support services.

Within the Housing Agency Agreement concerning the transfer of Council housing to Housing Hartlepool, it was agreed to adopt a Joint Allocations Policy, which would be subject to regular review and be in place for at least a five-year period following transfer.

This report details the findings of the review and makes detailed recommendations regarding access to accommodation for vulnerable groups along with clearer guidance for applicants and practitioners, as well as some necessary amendments to comply with legislative changes and recommended good practice.

Housing Hartlepool's Management Board has agreed the amendments arising from the review.

**3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

Portfolio Holder is responsible for Housing Services.

**4. TYPE OF DECISION**

Key decision (Test (ii) applies).

**5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE**

Portfolio Holder.

**6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED**

To approve the recommended amendments to the Joint Allocations Policy between Housing Hartlepool and Hartlepool Borough Council.

**Report of:** Director of Neighbourhood Services

**Subject:** JOINT ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW

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## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise Members of the findings of the Joint Allocations Policy Review and seek approval for the recommended amendments necessary to ensure the policy is fit for purpose and complies with legislative requirements, in particular the introduction of Choice Based Lettings by the Governments target of 2010.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Although the Council transferred ownership of all its housing stock to Housing Hartlepool (HH) in March 2004, the Council retains both strategic and statutory responsibilities for housing issues throughout the town. As part of the process of the stock transfer the Housing Agency Agreement was developed between the Council and Housing Hartlepool and within this it was agreed that we would operate a Joint Allocations Policy (JAP).
- 2.2.1 Under the terms of the Housing Agency Agreement the JAP is subject to regular review and will remain in place for at least five years following the transfer of stock. As well as ensuring the Council can meet its statutory responsibilities for housing and homelessness, the JAP also has a key role to play in helping the Council achieve its key housing priorities which are to:
- Achieve balance in local housing markets
  - Meet the housing needs of vulnerable people
- 2.3 A review has been undertaken by officers from Housing Hartlepool (HH) and HBC who are responsible for overseeing the JAP's operation and the monitoring of the Housing Agency Agreement. Additionally an independent review of the JAP also formed part of a piece of work by Peter Fletcher Associates, commissioned by the Safer Hartlepool Partnership following concerns that vulnerable groups of applicants, particularly those with issues around offending and/or substance misuse, were finding it difficult to access suitable permanent accommodation and that this was causing a major barrier to their successful rehabilitation, as well as having a negative impact on the level of crime and disorder and ultimately the sustainability of neighbourhoods and the community.
- 2.4 The review is particularly timely given Governments ongoing consultation with regard to developing a "Respect Standard for Housing Management". An opportunity has also been taken to refer to the future introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL), and amendments to the JAP with the development of a preferred scheme.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 The methodology adopted was firstly to identify changes within the strategic context within which the JAP has to operate and where it is required to be fit for purpose in delivering outcomes. This includes:
- the operation of the housing market
  - delivery of the homelessness strategy
  - responding to developing local needs
  - issues arising from the operation of internal controls and compliance with regulatory guidance
  - responding to national policy initiatives
- 3.2 As is often the case in the review of any policy, the above tests are not discrete, and issues are inter-connected.
- 3.3 The existing provisions within the JAP were then tested with regard to the ability to effectively meet requirements given the identified changes within the above contexts, and recommendations made as to amendments, which would make the policy function more effective.
- 3.4 The opportunity has also been taken to amend the policy with regard to identified procedural “inefficiencies”, and introduce approaches to delivering emerging policy issues, for example, developing the framework for Choice Based Lettings which all Local Housing Authorities (LHA's) must have in place by 2010 and which is hoped to be ready for adoption in Hartlepool during 2007/08 ahead of the governments target.
- 3.5 This report will summarise the conclusions reached by the review and give the detailed recommendations for amending the policy.

### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS**

#### **4.1 Operation of the Market: Issues**

- 4.2 2005/06 witnessed the continuing trend of applicants finding it increasingly difficult to secure a social rented property from HH with the additional pressures caused by reduced supply and increasing demand. A full analysis is included within Appendix 1.
- 4.3 This has inevitably resulted in the “price”, measured in terms of allocated priority, increasing. The effect of this is that to qualify, particularly for general needs family accommodation, often requires applicants to have been awarded a high priority, and often a homeless person's priority. Although this reflects the market and the policy gives those in the most need “reasonable” priority, there are issues raised by the operation of the JAP under the present housing market conditions. Firstly, other groups within the housing register who have a reasonable level of housing need are finding it increasingly difficult to access HH property. Secondly, in meeting the requirements of those with the highest assessed need it has been

difficult to demonstrate that Housing Corporation guidance (02/03 Local Authority Nominations) is being followed in that a “reasonable proportion of housing is being set aside to satisfy internal transfers”.

- 4.4 In common with many communities in the UK, Hartlepool has experienced a significant increase over the last year of European “A8” nationals i.e. from Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, who have settled to work in the town. Applications for registration on the Housing Register have been received from these nationals and their eligibility is subject to separate guidance from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLOG) and the Home Office.
- 4.5 The review also highlighted that Hartlepool does not participate in “Move UK”. Move UK is a national scheme which enables tenants of social landlords to access a range of services which assist in achieving their geographical mobility, including:

- Homeswap
- New start
- Shared ownership
- Homemove
- Seaside and country homes

Move UK also provides associated services:

- Homesearch
- Landlord directory
- Jobsearch
- Area information

The scheme is voluntary and gives tenants who wish to locate to another part of the country an excellent data base of others who may wish to exchange with them but also associated information regarding employment opportunities and the availability of services. The scheme operates on a number of levels where tenants achieve mobility via the right of exchange or by direct application to a landlord for available empty properties. Allocations of empty properties are subject to the local allocation policy and the acceptance of nominations through Move UK operates on a reciprocal basis between local authorities.

- 4.6 Nomination agreements between a local authority and Housing Associations are not that common in the North East, because of the previous ease of access to council housing. However, the shift in the in the local housing market makes it vital that the nomination agreements between HBC and other RSL’s are strengthened, effectively monitored and enforced. The DCLG and the Housing Corporation has provided guidance on what should be incorporated into nomination agreements, in “Effective Co-operation in Tackling Homelessness: Nomination Agreements and Exclusions”, published in 2004. The HC consultation paper on Homelessness (April 06) echoes many of these points, and particularly that blanket bans are not acceptable as justification for refusing nominations:

“Where exclusion policies operate, we want them to be clearly understood and underpinned by proper risk assessments and transparent policies where each case is judged on its merits. We have made it clear in Circular 07/04 that blanket bans arising from certain types of past behaviour (such as debt, history of anti-social behaviour or previous imprisonment) are not

acceptable.” ..... “Evidence about reasons for refusing nomination and reasons for the local authority’s selection of nominees is limited. “

- 4.7 Housing Associations are bound by the HC Regulatory Code to co-operate with the LHA in discharging its duties to homeless applicants, and the guidance produced in 2004 reminds LHA’s and RSL’s that it is good practice to have a nomination agreement with all RSL’s to set down what is expected of each party.
- 4.8 Therefore the following amendments to the policy are recommended in response to the operation of the local market for social housing:

- R1. That a ratio be introduced with regard to the allocation of general needs family accommodation, with one in every three properties becoming available being offered to internal transfers or need categories other than homeless persons. The operation of the ratio will be as guidance and be flexible where for example the allocation of a property for an internal transfer or other need category would result in a homeless household remaining in temporary accommodation.**
- R2. Those households who are awarded “threatened with homeless priority” are awarded the priority for a period of six months. The priority would only be awarded outside the six-month period if the applicant had not received an offer of accommodation suitable to their needs.**
- R3. That with regard to applications from European “A8” nationals that these be referred directly to the Council’s Housing Advice Team and eligibility to register be determined subject to the relevant guidance.**
- R4. That the policy includes reference to participation within Move UK**
- R5. A standard nominations agreement should be adopted between HBC and all RSL’s operating in Hartlepool including robust arrangements for monitoring and review.**

## **5. DELIVERING THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY AND ACKNOWLEDGING DEVELOPING LOCAL NEEDS**

- 5.1 As stated earlier, Peter Fletcher Associates were originally commissioned utilising finance made available by the Safer Hartlepool Partnership to initially to examine issues regarding the accessing of permanent housing of ex offenders and substance abusers. The remit of the study widened to include a review of the JAP to ensure it is fit for purpose both with regard to statutory and regulatory guidance and in terms of its usability for applicants and practitioners.
- 5.2 The review focused upon key sections of the policy and made recommendations to ensure that the JAP continues to comply with statutory and regulatory guidance and reflects elements of best practice within the sector.

- 5.3 **Prioritising Applications and Giving Reasonable Preference.** S 167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 says that local authorities must give reasonable preference within their policy and within their procedures to people in particular groups. Recent case law has emphasised that this is not to be ignored, even where CBL schemes are in use.
- 5.4 Groups that are to be given reasonable preference are:
- Homeless applicants (including 'priority' and 'non-priority', intentional homeless, and those who are threatened with homelessness)
  - People living in unsanitary or overcrowded conditions
  - People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds
  - People who need to move to a particular area to avoid hardship
  - Additional preference - people in urgent housing need
- 5.5 The DCLG Code of Guidance advises LHA's to ensure they have mechanisms in place for assessing the needs of each applicant, identifying the applicants in the greatest need, taking account of people who qualify under more than one category, and monitoring the outcome of allocations. It also advises that you may give additional preference to other groups, so long as these do not outweigh the preference given to the groups set out above.
- 5.6 The consultants point out that it is not clear that reasonable preference is given in the existing HBC/ HH Joint Allocations Policy or in the procedures set out for staff. This raises the question as to how does the JAP demonstrate that reasonable preference is given to people in the required categories, or between those categories, or to people who qualify in more than one category? It is also not clear how people who are not statutorily homeless are to be given reasonable preference.
- 5.7 With regard to Prioritising Applications and Giving Reasonable Preference the following amendments to the policy are recommended:
- R6. Allocations Policy to state how applications will be dealt with where applicants are in one of the reasonable preference groups, and where applicants are in more than one of these groups**
- R7. Preference to be given to all homeless or potentially homeless applicants – and policy should state how a threat of homelessness would be assessed and who would allocate the additional points as a result of this being recognised**
- 5.8 **Helping Vulnerable Households through the System** - people leaving designated supported accommodation get priority outside the normal system however there is no guidance provided for staff about how to apply this, or for other agencies who are working with this group, other than a list in Appendix C of the policy identifying the supported accommodation from which priority would be given for moving on.



5.9 The review highlighted the need to develop a co-ordinated way of allocating property and housing based support. The proposal is to develop a “Panel” at which relevant agencies would be represented to case manage vulnerable individuals and ensure access and co-ordination of accommodation and other resources (details attached in appendix 2).

5.10 For Helping Vulnerable Households through the System the following amendments to the policy are recommended:

**R8. The JAP and guidance to be amended to show clearly how people moving from designated supported housing will be given priority: what priority it gives, any circumstances under which priority would not be given, and how the need to move on would be recognised alongside any other priorities for being in reasonable preference groups.**

**R9. That a Hartlepool Vulnerable Persons Housing Panel be established, as detailed in appendix 2, and that this be serviced by the appointment of a full time Vulnerable Persons Panel Coordinator.**

**Members are advised that recommendation R9 includes the proposed appointment of a full time position and has direct financial implications for the Council. The possibility of this new appointment has been included as a budget pressure consideration and the progress in establishing a Vulnerable Persons Housing Panel, is subject to council approval of this appointment for 2007/8**

5.11 **Under 18's** - there is a debate in process around the country about whether under 18's can be excluded from applying on housing registers. The Homelessness Act 2002 amended S.160 of the Housing Act 1996 to the effect that all applications for social housing must be considered unless they are subject to immigration control, or considered to be unsuitable because of unacceptable behaviour. Those authorities which say that applicants under 18 may not be considered for rehousing unless they are homeless may have policies which contravene the legislation. Newcastle is currently seeking a barrister's advice on this.

5.12 The Joint Allocation Policy states that “Anyone of 16 years or over may apply for re-housing but will not normally be considered for re-housing until they are 18 years of age. Applicants of 16 or 17 years will normally be suspended until their 18th birthday but only after they have been visited and their application assessed.” It is not clear what criteria will be used to assess applications and the staff guidelines do not clarify this. It is becoming common for this group to be housed only after they have been assessed as being able to manage a tenancy, but the JAP does not say whether this is the case.

5.13 With regard to Under 18's the following amendments to the policy are recommended:

**R10. Clarification within the Policy as to the circumstances which an applicant under 18 years old would be accepted onto the register. To be accepted onto the register the applicant must be competent to manage a tenancy, and the criteria for who will assess this and how will be published within the JAP, and be accompanied by guidance for agencies working with this age group about how to help young people to gain tenancy management and independent living skills**

5.14 **Suspension from the Housing Register** - the Homelessness Act 2002 says that Housing Authorities and Housing Associations may no longer decide that groups of applicants can be excluded from their lists. However, individual applicants can be considered unsuitable as tenants because of “unacceptable behaviour”. This can be because of:

- Rent arrears – only significant rent arrears should be taken into account in deciding that the applicant is not suitable to be a tenant –
- Past poor behaviour – only evidence of recent anti-social behaviour should be taken into account, or previous poor behaviour which is still current and relevant to the tenancy.

In either case, the housing organisation must be certain that they could have detained an absolute possession order (one that is not suspended), had the applicant already been a tenant.

5.15 The review confirms that the JAP correctly lists behaviour that could lead to a Possession Order but does not state that this has to be an absolute (or immediate) Possession Order.

5.16 With regard to Suspension from the Register the following amendments to the policy are recommended:

**R11. Policy to be amended to state that an applicant would be suspended only if there was evidence of unacceptable behaviour that would have led to an absolute Possession Order, that the £200 is only a guideline, and that this will be reviewed in the light of recent court cases in the area**

**R12. Guidance should be provided for applicants and staff to give greater detail on what circumstances would be likely to lead to an absolute possession order.**

**R13. Policy should be amended to make it clear that a breach of tenancy in relation to another social landlord, and an attack on a member of staff, would have to be one that would be likely to lead to an absolute Possession Order.**

**R14. Guidance should be provided for both applicants and staff to give greater detail on how repayment of rent arrears could lead**

**to suspension being lifted, and what evidence would be required for a suspension for ASB to be lifted.**

- R15. Guidance needs to be clarified on whether homeless applicants are suspended from the housing register, and what action is taken to ensure they can be rehoused if they are suspended. Ideally, the Policy should be revised so that it is not possible for a suspension to be applied where an applicant has been accepted as statutorily homeless.**
- R16. Advice agencies and other organisations should be encouraged to help applicants to work towards having their suspensions lifted.**

- 5.17 **Criminal Records** - the JAP states that if the applicant denies any criminal record, but the Council or HH have reason to suspect they are not telling the truth, they should be asked to provide a copy of their criminal record. The applicant should be advised that any fee charged upon production of a valid receipt if it proves to be clear of any relevant offence will be reimbursed. However, it can sometimes take several weeks for an applicant to obtain an official print out of their criminal record from the police and therefore if written confirmation can be obtained from another official source, such as their Probation Officer or solicitor, this should be requested.
- 5.18 Housing providers are allowed to ask about an individual's criminal record, but if that individual's record is classed as spent, the individual has the right not to disclose their record under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.
- 5.19 Under current legislation, individuals can exercise their right to apply for access to information held on them including criminal record information under the 'subject access' provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. Currently, some employers seek to obtain this information about employees and potential employees by compelling them to exercise their rights under the Data Protection Act. This process is known as 'Enforced Subject Access' and is undesirable because details of all convictions are revealed. Most employers are not entitled to ask for this information under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974.
- 5.20 Under the Data Protection Act 1998 as amended in 2000 the government has made an enforced subject access illegal. Therefore if housing providers are asking applicants to provide proof of a clear record by way of a subject access they are breaking the law.
- 5.21 Many social landlords have an arrangement with the Police for information about criminal record to be extracted, on request by the landlord and with consent from the applicant, free of charge to applicant. In Tyne & Wear, this is the Safer Estates Agreement. Northumbria Police provide the information from their records, in an agreed format.

- 5.22 The Neighbourhood Policing pilot in Hartlepool provides an opportunity to replicate this, and the Police are in the process of negotiating something similar in Redcar & Cleveland, so there is a precedent already set in Cleveland Police Force area. The information is used in the private rented sector as well as in the social housing sector.
- 5.23 With regard to Criminal Records the following amendments to the policy are recommended:
- R17. HH and HBC to end the practice of requesting applicants to provide evidence that they have no criminal record or details of what their criminal record is.**
- R18. HH and HBC to negotiate to explore whether the Safer Estates Agreement could be replicated in Hartlepool, so as to receive information from the Police about the criminal record of applicants for social or private housing**
- 5.24 In May 2005 HH adopted a policy for the repurchase of properties which had been subject to the Right to Buy. An important driver to the adoption of the policy was the potential in some circumstances to prevent homelessness by HH acquiring the property. In ensuring the continuity of occupation the JAP will require amendment in order that the family in occupation can be allocated an assured tenancy
- 5.25 It is therefore recommended that:
- R19. Where HH acquire a former Right to Buy property that the occupiers are allocated the assured tenancy of the property providing the property meets their assessed needs in terms of the JAP**
- 5.26 **Compliance with regulatory guidance and responding to national policy initiatives.**
- 5.27 The latest regulatory self-assessment undertaken by Housing Hartlepool confirms that it is fully compliant with regard to the requirements of meeting housing needs.
- 5.28 HBC and HH are aiming to introduce a Choice Based Lettings scheme during 2007/8. Currently both organisations are involved in a project to establish the feasibility of participating in a Tees Valley sub-regional model. There are however outstanding tasks to be undertaken in preparation for CBL, and the following recommendations are made which will impact on the future operation of the JAP.
- 5.29 The change from traditional allocation systems to CBL is a radical step. There are major policy and practice issues such as balancing need and choice, ensuring that vulnerable households are not disadvantaged, and making systems customer-orientated. Equally significant are organisational and

management issues such as developing effective partnership working, building up project management skills and resolving information communications technology (ICT) challenges.

5.30 The requirements for the long-term vision for CBL include:

- A need for enhanced advice and support on welfare benefits, rents, money advice and household budgeting
- Better information will be needed on advertised properties and neighbourhoods so that customers can readily and easily compare the detailed attributes of each home
- Social landlords are likely to engage in competitive marketing behaviour highlighting added-value elements for customers
- Customers will require even better up-to-date information on the social housing market.

5.31 Recommendations with regard to the preparation for Choice Based Lettings -

**R20. To exclude all supported housing from the CBL process**

**R21. In preparation to redesign the JAP in 2006/7 to provide a banded approach to priority which is more appropriate to CBL**

**R22. To explore the development of a Housing Options Centre which will be necessary to facilitate the introduction and management of CBL as well as enhancing the Housing Advice Service and enable continuous improvement on homelessness prevention.**

5.32 The future introduction of CBL will involve a radical change to the traditional allocations process and a further detailed report to Cabinet, including a business case for the resource implication of providing the necessary Housing Options Centre, will be produced.

5.33 The recent Government consultation paper “A Respect Standard for Housing Management” contains significant challenges to social landlords to deliver services, which support creating sustainable communities where people feel safe, secure and happy to live.

5.34 The paper is focused on seeking 10 commitments from social landlords to deliver specific outcomes in support of the stated policy objectives. On examination there are clear linkages between the recommended amendments to the JAP, particularly the development of the “Panel” and the “building blocks” identified within the consultation paper, including:

- Regularly reviewing allocations and letting policies to ensure issues of respect and anti-social behaviour are fully reflected – for example sensitive lettings to avoid potentially problematic situations and identifying vulnerable individuals who may require intensive tenancy support

- Undertaking full assessments of any potential problems that may require tenancy support when entering into a new tenancy agreements and delivering appropriate support
- Delivery of intensive tenancy support for residents identified as vulnerable or at high risk of anti social conduct
- Follow clear policies and procedures on dealing with vulnerable residents (for example mental health issues and drug and alcohol problems)
- Where available and appropriate referral to residential intensive rehabilitation programmes for residents with complex support needs

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The review to the JAP has been subject to structured discussion with stakeholders as part of the formal review process.
- 6.2 The Housing Partnership considered and agreed the draft amendments at their meeting on the 14 June 2006.
- 6.3 The Tenants Consultation Panel considered the draft recommendations on the 17 June 2006.

## **7. RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1.1 Portfolio Holder is requested to approve the amendments to the Joint Allocations Policy which are highlighted in bold within Sections 4 and 5 of this report.

## Appendix 1

**ISSUES INFLUENCING THE AMMENDMENT OF THE JOINT ALLOCATION POLICY****The Market for Social Rented Housing**

2005/06 witnessed the continuing trend of applicants finding it increasingly difficult to secure a social rented property from HH. As the dominant provider of social rented property within the town the supply of available accommodation from HH is a key variable in gauging whether there should be review of the eligibility criteria and priority weighting within the policy.

Table 1 demonstrates the change in the number of terminations, Right to Buy sales, total lettings and void property rates between 2003/04, 2004/05 and 2005/06.

**Table 1.****Supply of HBC/HH Housing Stock 2003-2006**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>(+/-)% change since 03/04</b>
Total Stock	7502	7243	7097	- 5.4%
Terminations	1484	983	690	-54.5% (-29.8% from 04/05)
RTB	313	259	113	- 56% from 04/05
Lettings	991	840	642	- 35.2%
Void Rate and No.	2% (156)	1.4% (105)	1.3% (97)	- 35%

**Source: Housing Hartlepool**

Table 1 includes a basket of indicators all of which illustrate the trend of reduced availability within Housing Hartlepool's stock. Right to Buy completions in 2005/06 were significantly lower than in the previous two years, although they were in line with the forecast within the Business Plan. This reflected the growth in capital values and factors such the dampening in the reaction to transfer by tenants. RTB has though substantially contributed to the 5.4% reduction in stock numbers since transfer; almost all the units sold being general needs for families.

The 29.8% decrease in the number of terminations and 35.2% decrease in lettings (23% in 05/06) has been marked and has continued a year upon year trend.

Another aspect that illustrates the trend in the market is the shift in the proportion of the property types becoming available for re-let. Table 2 contains an analysis that tracks the situation from 2003/04.

In terms of the review of the JAP the most significant issue raised by the data in Table 2 is the 28% reduction in the number of houses let in 2005/06. This again reflects the impact in the price inflation of the local housing market (27% since 05/06), and of RTB completions over the last three years. The position is particularly acute with regard to three bedroom houses, which made up 61% of RTB completions in 2005/06. The significance of this is the reduction in the ability to re-house households with children, particularly those with more than one child, who are in acute need and are often homeless. This is confirmed within the 2005/06 CORE returns which reports that the

46.7% of all letting made within 2005/06 were to single adults aged 16 to 59, with 20.2% of lettings made to a household containing a child.

**Table 2. Lettings of HBC/HH Property by Type**

<b>Property Type</b>				
<b>No. &amp; %</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% Change</b>
House	499	391	280	- 44%
Bungalow	94	108	79	- 16%
Bedsit	62	47	55	- 11%
Flat	380	337	251	- 44%
Maisonette	5	4	2	- 60%

**Source: Housing Hartlepool**

The demand side of the equation confirms the situation that accessing social housing in Hartlepool for most household types is becoming increasingly difficult. At the end of June 2006 there were 3089 households registered. This compares to 2590 in June 2005. This excludes applications for a transfer from existing tenants of Housing Hartlepool.

Caution is required in measuring demand by the “size” of a housing register alone. This is due to the Housing Register being open to all who wish to register and not only applicants with an “objective” housing need. Therefore to obtain a better understand the situation there is a need to “drill down” into the register and examine the situation with regard to applicants with a high level of assessed need which included homelessness, disability and where applicants homes are subject to clearance schemes.

**Table 3 lays out the number of households that have been awarded a priority status and are waiting to be re-housed as of June 2006.**

**Table 3. “High Priority Applications” 2004/06**

<b>Allocation Category</b>	<b>June 2004</b>	<b>June 2005</b>	<b>June 2006</b>
Homelessness	43	55	5
Disability	22	30	55
Clearance	0	71	50

**Source: Housing Hartlepool**

42% (272) of all lettings made by Housing Hartlepool in 2005/06 were made to these three priority groups.

To summarise, the situation has continued the trends identified in 2005:

- Reducing supply of accommodation
- Increasing demand on the waiting list
- Increasing demand particularly from vulnerable applicant groups, although there has been a marked success in homelessness prevention



## Appendix 2

### **Hartlepool Vulnerable Persons Housing Panel: Terms of Reference - June 2006**

#### **Primary Objectives of the Panel:**

- To share information about rough sleepers in Hartlepool and formulate multi-agency action plans to resettle people into appropriate accommodation and housing support services.
- To share information about people who are due to return to Hartlepool from prison within the next 2 months, but who have no confirmed accommodation. To establish plans for resolving the housing and support needs of these people, in line with the HARP Protocol and Hartlepool Protocol for Housing Offenders and Substance Mis-users.
- To share information about existing tenants at risk of homelessness, due to potential or actual risk of eviction. Where possible, to establish support plans with the aim of maintaining those tenancies. Where action to evict is imminent, to consider options for resettlement elsewhere.
- To prioritise service users for forthcoming vacancies in hostels and supported accommodation services (including floating support), based on assessments of need and matching these needs with available placements.
- To identify service users in hostels / supported accommodation projects, whom are ready to move on into independent tenancies. To establish suitable move-on accommodation for these service users, with appropriate packages of follow-on support where needed.
- To ensure that specialist hostel / supported projects are utilised as effectively as possible, by promoting sustainable move-on accommodation and support plans, thus increasing availability of placements for people in need of a period intensive support in staffed accommodation projects.
- The Panel is not intended to offer an emergency response for homeless people in crisis situations, needing an immediate response.
- To monitor the Hartlepool Protocol for Housing Offenders and Substance Misusers, and make recommendations for any changes to the Protocol

#### **Panel Steering Group:**

The Steering Group will be made up of senior managers from the agencies which are core members of the Panel, as outlined below. It is envisaged that, once the panel is fully functional, the Steering Group would need to meet on a 6 monthly basis. The functions of the Steering Group are:

- To ensure that their staff representatives on the Panel have sufficient delegated authority to participate effectively in the Panel decision-making processes. This may include decisions on allocation of resources.

- To ensure that the Panel operates within local agency and multi-agency policies / procedures and joint working protocols.
- To ensure consistent attendance at Panel meetings by participating agencies.
- To receive an annual progress report from the Chair of the Panel, highlighting areas of success and issues which need to be addressed at policy and strategic levels. Where such issues are identified, the Steering Group will ensure that these are addressed by the relevant strategic and policy managers. (e.g. by feeding into reviews of Homelessness and S.P. Strategies)

**Panel Membership:**

Panel membership will include representation from all of the key housing / housing support agencies in Hartlepool, together with other agencies (e.g. substance misuse services) with a direct interest in housing needs of vulnerable people. All Panel members (both core members and additional members) will be signatories to the multi-agency protocol on housing ex-offenders and people with substance misuse problems, which includes an information sharing protocol. Core members will attend all meetings, while the additional members will attend when service users' circumstances needs indicate that input from that agency is likely to be integral to current or future housing and support needs.

**Core members:**

- Hartlepool Council (*Chair*)
- Housing Hartlepool
- Stonham Housing
- Probation / Dordrecht
- Endeavour Housing
- SmartMove
- YOS
- Supporting People
- Registered private sector landlord representative

**Additional members:**

- Social Services Department
- Women's refuge
- DISC
- Substance Misuse Team
- CMHT
- Advance
- Other agencies as appropriate

On occasions, it may be appropriate to invite representatives of non-participating agencies to a Panel meeting in order to assist with a support plan, where the initial assessment indicates a specialist area of need. This could include, for example, training agencies, voluntary organisations, disability services, etc. An initial decision to invite organisations who are not Panel members would be made by the Panel Co-ordinator, in conjunction with the referring agency.

**Frequency of meetings:**

- Panel Meetings will be scheduled on a monthly basis. If there are no new referrals and no other urgent business, the Panel Co-ordinator may decide to cancel the meeting.

**Panel Co-ordination**

The Panel will be co-ordinated and chaired by Hartlepool Council, who will appoint a senior officer from the Housing Directorate, as Panel Co-ordinator. The Panel Co-ordinator will be responsible for:

- Setting dates and arranging venues for Panel meetings.
- Chairing Panel meetings and ensuring minutes are taken and circulated
- Accepting referrals of clients from participating agencies
- Ensuring that referral information is adequate and that service users referred fall within Panel criteria (*to be determined by the Panel*). If it is decided that further assessment is necessary prior to discussion at the Panel, ensuring that a referral for assessment is made to the appropriate agency.
- If further assessments are necessary obtaining permission for this from the client and co-coordinating the assessment with the relevant agency.
- Checking that the referring agency has provided a copy of an information sharing consent form, signed by the service user.
- Identifying any other agencies that may need to be involved in providing a resettlement plan and support package to the client and ensuring that these agencies are invited to the panel meeting. This may require specific consent from the service user.
- Ensuring that written referral information and needs assessments are circulated to all Panel members at least 7 days in advance of the Panel meeting.
- Ensuring that meetings are minuted and that decisions regarding service users are written up on client case files held by the identified lead agency for each service user.
- Keeping records, statistics etc. in order to effectively monitor and evaluate the work of the Panel.
- Feeding back monitoring and evaluation of the Panel to the Steering Group, highlighting any issues arising from operation of the Panel, which need to be addressed on a strategic / multi-agency level.

**Referral Procedure for participating agencies:**

- Check that the service user meets the agreed criteria.

- Explain the Panel process to the service user, including the referral and assessment procedure, the agencies involved and the possible outcomes.
- Ensure that the service user signs a consent form, allowing for all relevant information to be shared between organisations represented on the Panel.
- Undertake a comprehensive needs assessment (*Need a format for this – or use the Shelter template?*) and forward this to the Panel Coordinator, together with the signed client consent form. (See information sharing protocol)
- For inclusion on the next scheduled Panel meeting, the documents will need to be delivered to the Co-ordinator at least 10 working days in advance.

**Meeting format:**

Meetings will have the following standard agenda items:

- Minutes of previous meeting
- Matters arising
- Service users to be discussed
- Feedback on service users previously assessed
- Strategic and policy issues to refer into the Steering Group.

**Decision Making:**

Agencies taking part in discussion and planning for a service user will share collective responsibility for delivering agreed housing and support plans.

On the basis of the needs assessment received at least 7 days in advance of the meeting, agency representatives will attend with pre-prepared information on the services which their agency could provide as part of a package of housing and support.

In the unlikely event that the Panel is unable to reach agreement on an appropriate package of services, the matter will be referred to the Chair of the Steering Group, who will consult with other Steering Group members, with the aim of reaching an outcome which can meet the needs of the service user.

**User participation:**

An underlying principle of HVPHP will be to ensure that user participation is at the centre of the Panel process. To this end all participating agencies agree to:

- Ensure equality of opportunity is central to the assessment, resettlement and support plan process, for example by means of monitoring, provision of interpreters, provision of advocates etc.
- Ensure views and opinions of clients are taken into account during the comprehensive needs assessment.

- Ensure clients are given the opportunity and practical assistance to attend discussions of their cases at Panel meetings, should they wish to and feel able to do so
- Ensure that the view of the client is taken into account when decisions are made about resettlement and support plans.

## **REGENERATION, LIVEABILITY & HOUSING PORTFOLIO**

Report To Portfolio Holder

18 December 2006



**Report of:** Head of Neighbourhood Management

**Subject:** HEADLAND ENVIRONMENTAL  
IMPROVEMENTS 2006/07 CROFT GARDENS

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### **SUMMARY**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To seek approval to proceed with additional Environmental Improvements at Croft Gardens using Seymour Civil Engineering Ltd as the main contractor, as a continuation of the Headland Town Square works.

#### **2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS**

The report provides background on the Croft Gardens proposals and outlines the funding and time constraints relating to the delivery of the works.

#### **3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER**

The proposed scheme forms part of the continuing regeneration of the Headland within the North Hartlepool Partnerships programme and therefore of interest to the Regeneration, Liveability and Housing Portfolio Holder.

#### **4. TYPE OF DECISION**

Non-Key

#### **5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE**

Portfolio Holder, with separate approval from North Hartlepool Partnership Board.

**6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED**

The Portfolio Holder is requested to approve the implementation and adoption of the proposed additional works to Croft Gardens, as already approved by the NHP Board, and also approve awarding the works to Seymour Civil Engineering Ltd as a continuation to the Headland Town Square works.

**Report of:** Head of Neighbourhood Management

**Subject:** HEADLAND ENVIRONMENTAL  
IMPROVEMENTS 2006/07

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## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To seek approval to proceed with additional Environmental Improvements to Croft Gardens using Seymour Civil Engineering Ltd as the main contractor, as a continuation of the Headland Town Square works.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The NHP has entered into its final year and the NHP Board, at their meeting on 17 November 2006, approved an additional funding contribution (circa 55k) to the £18.5k previously approved by Board on the 16 December 2005 and by the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Liveability on the 23 June 2006, for Environmental Improvement works to the Croft Gardens. Headland residents have also approved funding of 10k towards new benches via the Neighbourhood renewal fund.
- 2.2 Due to SRB funding requirements all works must be completed by the end of the NHP Regeneration Programme on 31 March 2007. In order to achieve this Seymour Civil Engineering Ltd have been approached to carry out the works as an addition to the Town Square contract (value 1.4 million), a scheme which was awarded to them via a competitive procurement process. Seymour's has given an undertaking that they will complete the works before the necessary deadline should they be awarded the works.
- 2.3 Advice has been sought from Hartlepool Borough Council's Legal Section, who have advised of no concerns in awarding the works to Seymour's as a 'variation' to the original Town Square contract.
- 2.4 A consultation meeting was held with the Friends of Croft Gardens on the 30 November 2006. The 'Friends of' identified areas (in addition to those previously approved) of work that they seen as priorities should funding be forthcoming, these were;
  - Resurface existing tarmac footpath in resin bound gravel to match Town Square History Garden.
  - Replacement of benches to match those provided within the Town Square.



- Provision of additional lighting to the gardens
- Replacement of existing steps.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 Funding of circa. £85k has been allocated to the Croft Gardens made up from;

• SRB HEIPAP/ HEIKRA	Circa £72,000
• Neighbourhood Action Plan	£10,000
• Headland Parish Council	£2,000
• Pride in Hartlepool	£1,000

### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Portfolio Holder is requested to:

- 4.1 Note the contents of the report and consider the decisions taken by the NHP Board on 17 November 2006 in deciding whether to approve the implementation of the above additional works to Croft Gardens
- 4.2 Authorise officers to progress with the development and also authorise the appointment of Seymour's to carry out the works as a continuation of the Town Square contract.