

## Support with Moving Policy (Housing, Maggie Ward)

### Synopsis of report:

**In order to facilitate best use of stock and access more properties suitable for adaptation for larger households, a Support with Moving Policy will provide financial incentives to tenants giving up larger homes and additional support with the logistics of a move where required.**

**This report provides members with the feedback from the consultation approved by this committee in September 2022**

### Recommendation:

**Members approve the Support with Moving Policy (Appendix A) for implementation.**

## 1. Context

- 1.1 In December 2021 the Housing Member Working Party discussed a policy to provide residents with additional support to facilitate moves. A draft policy was brought to this Committee in September 2022 where a consultation exercise with stakeholders was approved.
- 1.2 Social Housing landlords have historically paid incentive sums to tenants to move to smaller properties as housing need has increased. Runnymede has historically provided financial assistance and practical support with moving to residents downsizing. A large proportion of the Council housing stock is underoccupied by older tenants, many of whom live alone. Our data indicates that over 30% of older Runnymede Borough Council tenants are under-occupying their home. Across all tenures 67% of older people are estimated to be under-occupying their home.  
  
*“Under-occupation is particularly high among the 65+ cohort as 67% of older owner-occupier households in England are currently under-occupying, implying that there is plenty of opportunity for older households to downsize.” [Downsizing is socially desirable – and saves money on bills - Intergenerational Foundation \(if.org.uk\)](#)*
- 1.3 There is an increasing need for larger family properties, specifically those with two downstairs rooms that can be adapted to provide downstairs accommodation for a person requiring level access facilities.
- 1.4 The Social Sector Size Criteria which reduced the amount of benefit payable by 14% for one empty room and 25% for two, does not apply to people of pensionable age and so has had no impact on the level of under occupation in the borough. Most people only decide to downsize when they can no longer manage physically within their home and then request incentives which are not applicable as they want to move.
- 1.5 For older people on a low income with no capital, the cost of moving can be prohibitive or for those without a support network the prospect of managing a move can be daunting.

## 2. Report

2.1 Residents giving up a larger property will receive a payment to mitigate the cost of moving. Where a property has major adaptations or specific features that are no longer required and this is needed for another household, the Council will consider approaching the tenants and offering an incentive equivalent to the Statutory Homeless payment to secure this home. This payment will be significantly less than it would cost to adapt a family home for a disabled person requiring level access facilities.

### 2.2 Schedule of Payments

<b>Number of rooms giving up</b>	<b>Incentive up to a maximum of</b>	<b>Authorisation level</b>
One bedroom	Ten times weekly rent	Manager
Two bedrooms	Fifteen times weekly rent	Manager
Three bedrooms	Eighteen times weekly rent	Corporate Head of Housing
Move due to adaptation required	The statutory home loss payment	Corporate Head of Housing & Head of Housing Services & Business Planning

2.3 Eligibility for the scheme will be subject to criteria and acceptable management of the current tenancy.

2.4 Where a tenant requires adaptations, and they can be accessed by a mutual exchange, the Council will consider financial assistance with a move subject to a means test.

2.5 Where a tenant is in receipt of a low income and has no capital to support a move additional support can be accessed from the Housing Discretionary Hardship Fund.

2.6 Council officers can provide practical support with the move, including arranging removals and packing, assisting the tenant to arrange flooring, cooker connections, utility supplies. Subject to assessed need and where there is no support network. Housing staff will liaise with other agencies and charities to access support for the tenant where appropriate.

### 2.7 Consultation on the Draft Policy

The consultation included:

- A dedicated web page
- Email to those we have addresses for, with altered content depending on the audience
- A simplified version of the policy was sent to potentially over occupying tenants, with multiple ways for them to share their views, including paper survey, QR code, and contact number
- Telephone calls to those who have downsized to understand their experience and where they think we could improve for future residents.

The targeted audience:

- Potentially over-occupying tenants

- Tenants on the waiting list to downsize
- Tenants who have downsized

2.8 We consulted to understand tenants' views on what support the council should provide for those who may need help moving to a smaller home. This included how we could improve the way we currently provide support, and how we can help overcome barriers that tenants perceive stop them from moving.

2.9 Although there was limited response to the general communications the telephone calls provide some clear insight into what tenants would like and 20 people completed (although some only partially) a brief survey. There was overall support for the policy with discussions with residents highlighting that assistance with the logistics of a move will be as important as the financial benefits.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Assistance with furniture removals	64.29% 9	35.71% 5	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	14
Assistance with changing utility suppliers	57.14% 8	21.43% 3	21.43% 3	0% 0	0% 0	14
Post redirection	57.14% 8	21.43% 3	14.29% 2	7.14% 1	0% 0	14
Help with Benefit changes	38.46% 5	38.46% 5	23.08% 3	0% 0	0% 0	13
Organise carpets	71.43% 10	21.43% 3	7.14% 1	0% 0	0% 0	14
Reconnect cookers and other white goods	66.67% 10	33.33% 5	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	15
Apply for additional moving funds	64.29% 9	14.29% 2	21.43% 3	0% 0	0% 0	14
Help arrange contents insurance	28.57% 4	21.43% 3	28.57% 4	21.43% 3	0% 0	14

2.10 As a result of the feedback the following amendments have been made to the policy:

- Extending the policy offer to help tenants move to social housing outside of the Borough
- Tenants said a financial incentive before moving would be useful, so the costs don't cause difficulties. The Council will where appropriate pay contractors directly to ease the pressure.
- Residents said they would prefer a personal touch, rather than letters or phone calls. We will offer in-person meetings and will encourage a friend or family member to be there too

### 3. Policy framework implications

3.1 The following Strategies and Policies will be supported by the incentives available within this policy:

- Housing Strategy Statement
- Disabled Adaptations for Council Tenants Policy
- Decant Policy
- Tenancy Strategy
- Mutual Exchange Policy

- Disabled Adaptations Policy

#### **4. Resource implications/Value for Money**

- 4.1 The Council has a Disturbance Budget which should cover this scheme. If there are a significant number of moves arranged to access adapted properties resulting in higher payments a supplementary estimate for additional funds will be brought to this Committee.

#### **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 Paragraph 2 of Schedule 18 Housing Act 1996 grants a local housing authority the power to make payments to or for the benefit of a tenant or licensee of a dwelling-house within its Housing Revenue Account with a view to assisting or encouraging that person to move to qualifying accommodation. Qualifying accommodation means a dwelling-house made available to the person concerned as tenant or licensee by any of the following—
- a) the local housing authority making the grant or any other local housing authority;
  - b) a private registered provider of social housing; or
  - c) a registered social landlord.

#### **6. Other implications**

- 6.1 Housing's Engagement and Inclusion Officer managed an 8 week consultation period which combined general consultation communication with residents and some focussed conversations with service users who have recently or potentially might downsize.

#### **7. Equality implications**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Screening found there is no evidence that tenants with any of the nine protected characteristics will be negatively impacted by this policy.
- 7.2 It is therefore considered that the Council will comply with its Public Sector Equality duty when endorsing this Policy and a full impact assessment is not required at this stage.

#### **8. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 8.1 None identified

#### **9. Timetable for Implementation**

- 9.1 Following approval the Policy will be fully implemented within four weeks to arrange training and literature for residents.

(To resolve)

#### **Background Papers**

[Committee report September 2022](#)