

Briefing Note of:	Head of Housing and Partnerships
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PROMOTING PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**21 NOVEMBER 2018****WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW THE VULNERABLE PERSONS DECORATING AND GRASS CUTTING SCHEME – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA****1 Purpose of Briefing note**

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing note is to provide Members with details of the work carried out by the Working Group

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Committee on 4 July 2018 Members agreed to review the Eligibility Criteria for the Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass Cutting Scheme.
- 2.2 A separate smaller group of Members was established forming a Working Group to carry out a more in depth investigate of the Policy.

3 Detail

- 3.1 The Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass Cutting Scheme has been in place since 2010 (amended 2011). Rules have been adopted to ensure that the scheme was restricted to those who were most vulnerable who have no alternative means of internally decorating their homes, or cut the grass. Tenants who qualify can have 2 rooms decorated once every three years and the grass cut 16 times a year.
- 3.2 A Working Group of 4 Members was established to carry out the review and to then bring its findings back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.3 The Working Group has meet on 2 formal occasions and 1 informal occasion. Agendas, papers and minutes are included as appendices to this Briefing Note.
- 3.4 Officers delivered a presentation to the Working Group which explained the background to the scheme. The Working Group also considered approaches taken by other Social Housing Landlords.

- 3.5 The Working Group had unanimously agreed that the Grass Cutting Scheme did not require any amendment. The service was operating well and all eligible tenants who had requested the service were having their grass cut.
- 3.6 However, with regards to the Internal Decorating Scheme it was considered that it was important to retain the scheme but it was in need of review. The Group noted that it was fundamentally unfair to be on waiting list for a place on the Internal Decorating Scheme for 7 years and then to have to wait a further 3 years when a place becomes available before any decorating is undertaken.
- 3.7 The Working Group agreed that that the Promoting Prosperity Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider the following amendments to the Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass Cutting Scheme – Eligibility Criteria:-
- (A) To reduce the offer to 1 room being decorated once every 5 years thereby enabling all tenants to be included on the list. Consideration could be given to reducing the 5 years period once the waiting list had been reduced and the back log cleared.
 - (B) That a financial contribution of £100 towards the cost of decorating the hall, stairs and landing be applied. This should be paid in full in advance.
 - (C) That tenants should have a clear rent account for 3-6 months to be able to be included on the list. Additionally, no other sundry debtor payments, owing to Housing, should be outstanding.
 - (D) That where a tenant refused the date offered to them they should go on the reserve list for a cancellation, unless the reason for the refusal was for a medical reason or due to bereavement.
 - (E) That the scheme be reviewed after 2 years.
- 3.8 The Working Group requested officers investigate whether council tax arrears could be added to Amendment (C) criteria as a reason for exclusion from the list. Advice has been received from the Council's Local Taxation and Benefits Manager and Council's Solicitor which is discussed in 4.3 below.

4 Implications (if applicable)

4.1 Amendment (A)

Reduction of the amount of work carried out within a property from the current 2 rooms to 1 room will result in a reduction in the average cost per property. This will mean there will be more scope within the existing budget to complete more properties.

It is difficult to estimate the actual number of additional properties that could be undertaken if the revised criteria were approved. Although average costs would

be reduced the continuity of work for the painters would also be reduced. As a result the time saving does not equate to a 50% reduction.

It is suggested the reduction in the criteria from 2 rooms to 1 room per application will result in more completions per year thus reducing the current backlog. However, it is anticipated that tenants will choose to have larger rooms decorated given that that only one is being decorated. Therefore, in order to consider reducing the 5-year period it will be necessary to analyse the cost reduction per property following the first year of the introduction of any new scheme.

4.2 Amendment (B)

It is calculated that just fewer than 14% of the list are tenants occupying houses. Taking into account the number of houses decorated each year and that only a proportion request decoration of the hall, stairs and landing the amount to be collected from a £100 charge would be minimal which together with the associated administration cost would make it uneconomic to collect.

4.3 Amendment (C)

An analysis of the list identified only 4 tenants whose rent account was in arrears. Of these 3 were as a result of housing benefit changes due to the death of a partner and were expected to be resolved in the short-term.

It is possible to exclude those tenants with council tax arrears from benefitting from the service. However, in order to prevent a challenge from a vulnerable person with a “protected characteristic” it would be necessary to include an exceptional circumstance clause within the policy in relation to both council tax and rent arrears.

In addition, in order to be compliant under current data protection legislation it is also necessary to get consent before council tax records are accessed. Written consent would need to be obtained as part of the Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass Cutting application form.

5 Appendices

Appendix 1

Agenda – Scrutiny Working Group (Review of Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass Cutting Scheme – Eligibility Criteria) 16th August 2018

Appendix 2

Eligibility Criteria – Grass Cutting and Decoration

Appendix 3

Powerpoint slide – Vulnerable Decorating

Appendix 4

Minutes - Scrutiny Working Group (Review of Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass

Appendix 5	Cutting Scheme – Eligibility Criteria)16 th August 2018 Agenda – Scrutiny Working Group (Review of Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass Cutting Scheme – Eligibility Criteria) 10 th October 2018
Appendix 6	Notes of the Scrutiny Working Group (Review of Vulnerable Persons Decorating and Grass Cutting Scheme – Eligibility Criteria) 10 th October 2018

Background Papers

None