

## **City of York Tenancy Strategy - Summary of Consultation responses – 21 August 2012**

### **Overview of the consultation process:**

- A dedicated web page with a link to it from the Home page of the council's website.
- Two questionnaire formats were available, a quick online questionnaire and a more detailed hard copy questionnaire that was available for download off the website and distributed to a target audience.
- All RSLs with stock in York were written to with a copy of the strategy and questionnaire inviting them to comment.
- Email alerts with live links to the website were sent to a wide range of local partners/agencies.
- The homelessness strategy consultation event provided an opportunity for agencies to discuss and comment on the draft strategy.
- Good local media coverage such as a story in the York Press and an interview with Tom Brittain, Head of Housing Services City of York Council on 17 August 2012.
- York Residents Federation discussed the contents of the draft strategy and provided comments.
- Draft strategy featured in the council's 'Streets Ahead' publication, which is distributed to all council tenants.
- An article with links through to the consultation website was placed on the home page of the choice based lettings (Homechoice) website to encourage those on the York Housing Register to comment.
- Agencies working with homeless and potentially homeless customers were encouraged to discuss the consultation at teams meetings and meetings with service users.

### **List of respondents**

- Written submissions from x 3 registered social landlords (RSL)
  - Accent
  - Yorkshire Housing
  - York Housing Association
- Online responses x 25:
  - 1 private sector landlord
  - 1 RSL
  - 1 Community/voluntary group
  - 23 residents
    - Almost even split between male and female respondents
    - 88% white British, 4% 'other white' and 8% leaving question blank
    - 56% cohabiting, 24% single, 12 blank and 4% civil partnership
    - 40% declaring a Christian religion and 44% stating no religion with remainder leaving blank

- 84% heterosexual with one person identifying as a gay man
  - No one identifying as trans gender
  - 80% non disabled, 12% disabled and 3% leaving question blank
  - 8% carers and 84% non carers with 2% leaving blank
- York Residents Federation
  - Homelessness Strategy consultation event July 2012 – comments from a wide range of service providers and individuals.
  - Internal responses x 2 from colleagues in City of York Council homelessness services
  - External professional comments from Gill Leng of GLHS Ltd

### Q 1.3 The York housing market and agreed housing priorities

1.3.1 Do you think this section suitably reflects the position in York and has identified all the major factors impacting on market conditions, funding and the demand for services?

1.3.2 If not what suggestions do you have?

Respondents felt that, on the whole, this section suitably reflects the position in York, though some points of clarification were raised.

One respondent said demand for smaller sized affordable (i.e. social and 'affordable rent') accommodation can be expected to increase given the new 'bedroom tax' that forms part of the government's welfare reform package. This must be planned for in local housing providers' development strategies. The raising of non dependent benefit deductions also as part of welfare reform will increase pressure on claimants to ask family members to make up the difference or leave home.

The same respondent also felt there was potential for registered providers to develop affordable (up to 80% or market rents) or even full market rent homes for people who found access to home ownership difficult due to the credit crunch. There was also need for joined up working regarding adapted homes.

#### *The council's response:*

Changes will be made to this opening section to reflect the comments above. We will also add a section in concerning the new 'affordable rent' model.

### Q 2.1 Tenancies

2.1.1 Should the council support the limited use of fixed term tenancies?

2.1.2 If you answered 'yes', are there any instances when fixed term tenancies should not be used

2.1.3 Registered providers – what is your own policy position on fixed term tenancies?

Almost 50% of online respondents agree that the council should *not* support the widespread use of fixed term tenancies. Around half this number of respondents felt there should be no fixed term tenancies at all and a similar number felt that all tenancies should be fixed term.

A typical view was that lack of long term security for households would impact on community cohesion and the administrative burden of reviews and appeals would outweigh any other benefits.

Some respondents said fixed term tenancies would be disruptive to families with school age children in local schools. Others said they should definitely not be used for elderly, disabled or vulnerable households or where major adaptations had been done to support someone with a long term disability or condition. One registered provider commented that there were already sufficient measures available to deal with anti social behaviour or breach of tenancy.

Registered provider respondents indicated no plans to use fixed term tenancies on a routine basis and agreed with the draft strategy guidelines. One provider that meets the needs of more vulnerable households sometimes offers shorthold tenancies to emphasise that the accommodation is intended to prepare customers for independent living.

*The council's response:*

*We do not propose to radically change guidance relating to the use of fixed term tenancies in York, though more details will be provided on when fixed term tenancies may or may not be appropriate.*

Q 2.2 The affordable housing register and allocation of homes

- 2.2.1 Do you agree with the broad proposals to amend the allocations policy?
- 2.2.2 What measures might you wish to see to reduce waiting times, bureaucracy and costs?
- 2.2.3 What are your views on giving additional preference within the allocations policy to armed forces and ex-armed forces personnel?
- 2.2.4 What are your views on giving additional preference within the allocations policy to those making a positive contribution to their community?
- 2.2.5 Do you agree that additional preferences should be given to foster carers?
- 2.2.6 Should households that have sufficient income to meet their needs on the open market be able to apply for social housing?
- 2.2.7 Do you have any comments related to the above questions? If so, please use the space provided below.

84% of online respondents support a review of the North Yorkshire allocations policy in light of new powers granted within the Localism Bill 2011.

Just under half of respondents thought additional preference should be given to those that make a positive contribution to their community, but this was closely followed by those that felt no additional preference should be given. Concern was

raised about how one would assess community contribution and to the additional costs and administrative burdens this would entail. There were particularly mixed views from registered providers with one saying they already give additional preference to this group whilst others voiced concern about how 'community contribution' would be defined.

52% of respondents felt armed forces personnel should get additional preference in the allocation of social and affordable rent homes, whilst 40% thought they shouldn't and 8% either didn't know or left the answer blank. Those not supporting additional preference for this group said it would be unfair to other professions essential to society, such as firepersons, police officers and other 'key workers'. One registered provider supported this proposal

There was more support (56%) in favour of additional preference for foster carers and those intending to adopt, though 10% felt no preference should be awarded to these households. Some that oppose it say it could encourage the wrong type of people to become foster carers/adopters.

A majority (56%) of people felt those earning enough to meet their own housing need on the open market should not be able to apply for affordable housing, with the remainder either saying they should be allowed (32%) or didn't know (12%). Some felt those earning enough to reasonably meet their own housing needs contributed to the mix and sustainability of communities and so should not be excluded. Others felt excluding people on the basis of income or indeed charging higher rents to those tenants able to pay more would act as a powerful disincentive to self improvement.

To help reduce waiting lists one person suggested getting rid of Bronze band, and others said only allow those with genuine housing need onto the list. A common view was '*build more homes*,' especially affordable ones. Some said convert more empty space over shops, others said tackle under occupation or encourage more children to share bedrooms. Some suggested rent control in the private rented sector and tenancies that offered more security.

#### *The council's response:*

The feedback received through this consultation will be used to inform the impending North Yorkshire Allocations Policy review. There are very mixed views emerging from this consultation that should be subject to further debate with partner authorities and housing providers.

As it stands, the council is not inclined to recommend additional preference for community contribution nor to armed forces personnel for the reasons outlined above. We feel the overriding criteria should be housing need.

Nor are we proposing an earnings cap on applicants to the housing register, nor considering enhanced rents for higher earners. We believe these would generate disincentives to self improvement and undermine our work towards mixed sustainable communities. They would also entail additional administrative burdens and costs at a time when public finances are tight.

### Q 2.3 Homelessness and the private rented sector

- 2.3.1 Do you support our intended approach to make more use of private rented accommodation to accommodate homeless households?
- 2.3.2 Are there any other measures/safeguards you would like to see put in place to protect this particularly vulnerable group?
- 2.3.3 Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

76% of respondents supported more use of the private rented sector to accommodate homeless households, given the scarce supply of social rented homes and the high cost of temporary accommodation.

The remaining 24% of respondents either felt it shouldn't be used (16%) or said they didn't know (8%). Some said there would need to be strict criteria for the standard and appropriateness of accommodation offered. Others pointed to the high cost of private sector rents and the limited (in this case minimum 12 months) tenancies to be offered. Some doubted whether private sector lets would even be available to this client group given changes to local housing allowance and welfare reform.

#### *The council's response:*

The council will strengthen this section of the strategy, particularly its advice around appropriate standards of accommodation, in line with recent government guidance on this issue. The council will continue to work with private sector landlords to create greater choice for homeless households and ensure that where tenancies fail within the first two years, affected households are able to re-apply via the homeless route.

### Q 2.4 Mobility in social housing

- 2.4.1 Do you agree that City of York Council and registered providers within York should support greater mobility within the sector? What are your views and, if applicable, policy position on mobility in social housing?
- 2.4.2 How would you address the issues relating to differences in tenure/rent models for transferring tenants?
- 2.4.3 Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

All respondents supported more measures to encourage mobility within the social housing sector.

This question gave rise to an interesting array of comments. Some people argued that under occupiers should be *required* to move whilst others wanted to see more 'carrots' (i.e. incentives the move) rather than 'sticks'. One respondent suggested encouraging those earning over £50,000 per year to move or pay an enhanced 'market' rent, though they did not say anything about the possible disincentives this could pose to such households. Some said more information and encouragement was required so tenants know about the help and support available.

One registered provider said there was scope for social housing landlords to work more closely together in dealing with the effects of the 'bedroom tax', i.e. by offering smaller vacant units of accommodation to other landlords who have tenants wishing to downsize.

In response to question 2.4.2 register providers all agreed that correct advice and information to tenants was key so that they could make informed decisions.

*The council's response:*

We do not plan to amend this section of the tenancy strategy. We feel the section adequately covers all relevant issues noted above.

### Q 3.1 Monitoring, review and governance

3.1.1 Do you support the approach to monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of this strategy?

3.1.2 Who do you think should be represented on the steering group?

3.1.3 Do you have any further comments regarding the Tenancy Strategy?

There was general agreement about the proposed monitoring and review arrangements. Registered providers said all RPs and appropriate support agencies should be involved in monitoring the strategy, as well as private landlords, those who represent vulnerable or marginalised groups along with customer representation.

*The council's response:*

We will amend this section with more details about who should be involved in the monitoring and review process.

### Q Ap 3 Tenancy types and the policies of Registered Providers

Ap.3.1 Is this an accurate summary of the main types of tenancies in use?

Ap 3.2 RPs: Please advise the Housing Strategy team where your tenancy policy can be accessed, in line with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011.

There was general agreement that the list of tenancies was complete though one registered provider suggested a distinction be made between social rent assured tenancy and an affordable rent assured tenancy with the introduction of the new 'affordable rent' regime.

Most registered providers were yet to publish detailed tenancy policies

*The council's response:*

Small amendments will be made to this section in light of comments above and links will be made to published tenancy policies once these are available. It is important to note that tenancies will either be known as Flexible tenancies for local

authority tenants and Fixed Term Tenancies for RPs (when and if these are used).  
The length of tenure is not connected to the rent level.

End