

# **Cabinet Member Decision Note**

## **Tenant Academy-incentive scheme**

**To: Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety**

**Date: 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

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Author:	Director of Housing
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

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### **1. Purpose and Reasons**

- 1.1 This report seeks to allow a housing applicant's banding date to be back dated by 3 months as a clear incentive for participating in the Tenant Academy Greenlight Pre-tenancy Programme.
- 1.2 Pre-tenancy work is becoming increasingly important across housing organisations to prepare people for the responsibilities of successfully managing their tenancy.
- 1.3 The Tenant Academy pre-tenancy programme helps the Council deliver Priority 4 – Help people to help themselves by giving them the knowledge and skills they need to maintain a tenancy. The programme also helps deliver on Priority 2 by linking with Adult Community Learning team to promote additional learning opportunities and the benefits of gaining employment.
- 1.4 This proposal will not affect the banding priorities as band A applicants will still take precedence over band B applicants who receive this incentive.

### **2. Recommended Action to be Authorised by a Cabinet Member Under Delegated Powers**

#### Recommended that:

- 2.1 The Allocations policy is amended to enable the Director of Housing to backdate the banding date of an application by 3 months provided the applicant has completed the full Tenant Academy Greenlight to Housing Pre-Tenancy course.

### **3. Detail**

- 3.1 The Tenant Academy is working in partnership with Adult Community Learning to run monthly programmes for housing applicants who are at high risk of not being able to sustain a tenancy. These applicants include people in emergency accommodation and supported housing, and care leavers and young people who have no experience of how to run a tenancy.

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- 3.2 The pre-tenancy approach is recommended by the current Change Programme and forms part of the Void Change Programme by ensuring applicants are “tenancy ready”, this will also reduce the number of voids created by people unable to sustain their tenancy.
- 3.3 This preparation is especially important for people in emergency and temporary accommodation (including supported housing) who often have had challenges maintaining a tenancy in the past. The target group also includes care leavers. The Tenant Academy Greenlight training programme is a 3 day course which targets these groups. The amendment to the banding date has been proven by other organisations to be an incentive for people to attend.
- 3.4 All applicants to the housing register will be required to do standard pre-tenancy training in the form of an e-learning package. However this will not provide the intensive support this target group need so they will still be encouraged to attend this programme.
- 3.5 The service plan is to hold 10 courses per annum with up to 12 people on each course initially. Once experience is gained in running the programme it can be accelerated, increasing numbers attending to 16. This will enable between 120 – 160 people each year to attending the programme. They will also be able to access support through the Tenant Academy Greenlight to Housing programme.
- 3.6 The programme is held over 3 days and includes information about housing options, including private rented accommodation, understanding a tenancy agreement, rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords and household budgeting. It also prepares applicants for the financial cost of a new tenancy including the need to have rent in advance and savings for furniture, carpets etc. Participants have to attend all 3 days and actively participate in a number of tests and activities to demonstrate their learning.
- 3.7 Given the time commitment the course requires and the difficulty in engaging with our target market, Officers have looked at various incentives to encourage people to attend. It is considered that the 3 month backdating of the banding date will be a sufficient incentive for people to take time off work to attend the training (as is the experience in Bristol). However, if this does prove to be an issue more flexible delivery models will be considered. Crèche facilities will be provided on some courses.
- 3.8 As part of our research we looked As part of our research, Officers looked at a similar programme run by Bristol City Council, which has tried a number of incentives and found that backdating the banding date was the most attractive to

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applicants and cost effective for that local authority. The City Council now has a waiting list of people wanting to attend this programme. Therefore, it is recommended that Swindon Borough Council's Allocations policy is amended to enable the Director of Housing to backdate the banding date of an application by 3 months, provided the applicant has completed the full Tenant Academy 'Greenlight to Housing Pre-Tenancy course.

#### **4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 Officers considered using an incentive such as vouchers which could be issued when the applicant was accepted for housing. However, this option is more expensive and more difficult to administer. Officers also looked at whether a discount could be given on the first week's rent but again this would incur a cost to the Council. Feedback from Bristol City Council and the view of our supported housing providers is that this is also less attractive to our target market.
- 4.2 The Council could run the programme with no incentives, but it will be more difficult to encourage people to attend. This could result in them spending longer in emergency accommodation or struggling to sustain a tenancy in future.

#### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The following Opposition and Minority Group Spokespersons have been consulted on the recommendations of the report and their responses are also summarised below:

Councillor Pajak - 'Very much support this training course. Knowledge of the housing system is so useful and more so for vulnerable tenants.'

Councillor Donachie – No comment received

Councillor Dixon – No comment received

#### **6. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management**

##### Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial and procurement implications to this proposal.

##### Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 6.2 There are no legal and human rights implications to this proposal

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### All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 6.3 There are no other implications to this proposal.

### Diversity Impact Assessment

- 6.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed. No adverse impacts were identified on the basis of religion, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership status or pregnancy/maternity. A copy of the DIA with more detailed information can be obtained from Lynn Jarvie (ljarvie@swindon.gov.uk).

### Risk Management

- 6.5 A Risk Assessment has not been completed as this proposal has very limited impact on the allocations policy.

## **7. Consultees**

- 7.1 The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets (Section 151 Officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

## **8. Background Papers**

- 8.1 None

## **9. Appendices**

- 9.1 None

## **10. Declarations of Interest**

- 10.1 Cabinet Members are reminded to consider whether they have any known interests in any of the matters referred to in this Decision Note. If such an interest exists this should be declared to the Monitoring Officer (or Committee and Member Services Manager), and they should take no part in the consideration of the Decision Note and should refer the Decision Note to the Leader of the Council instead for consideration.

## **11. Sign-off**

- 11.1 The Cabinet Member is requested to respond with 5 days of the date of this report (30<sup>th</sup> September 2020).
- 11.2 Decisions of Cabinet Members will be published in the Members' Bulletin. The Decision must not be implemented until such time that a five-day "Call-in" period

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has expired. This date will be specified in the Members Bulletin. If a Decision is "called-in" it will be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. It must only be implemented if the Scrutiny Committee has raised no objection. If an objection is forthcoming the matter will be referred back to the Decision-Maker.

- 11.3 The Cabinet Member is requested to indicate one of the following responses to the Recommendations set out in Section 2 of this report:

[To be signed digitally but redacted for publication]