



## North Tyneside Council's Lettings Policy

### Consultation Report Results July 2019

#### 1. Lettings Policy Review

North Tyneside Council's Lettings Policy sets out the ways in which housing applications are assessed and how the Authority's housing stock is allocated. North Tyneside Council has reviewed its Lettings Policy to ensure that it is in line with government legislation, responds to the local housing market and that it best meets the needs of the Borough.

In carrying out this review, officers have considered the wider context including recent legislative changes, best practice from other organisations, feedback from Councillors, housing applicants and stakeholders. We have also worked with our 'involved tenants and residents' through the Housing Options Service Development Group. This review resulted in considering six changes to the policy.

In June 2019 we carried out consultation with our customers and stakeholders on the proposed changes. This report summarises the results of the consultation and how we propose to use the feedback.

#### 2. Consultation Process

The consultation process ran from 4<sup>th</sup> June 2019 - 13<sup>th</sup> July 2019 and involved applicants on North Tyneside Council's Housing Register, tenants and stakeholders. People were contacted by letter or email in the form of a survey, which included some background information around the reasons for the changes being considered. People were able to access the survey in a number of ways outlined below:

- 989 applicants were contacted by letter (a prepaid envelope was included)
- 2,268 applicants were contacted by email
- 1,223 applicants were current tenants of the Authority, wishing to 'transfer.'
- 68 stakeholders were emailed the online survey – they included Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Shelter, Harbour and Registered Social Housing Providers
- Posters and copies of the consultation survey were placed in the four Customer First Centres for anyone to complete
- The consultation was also placed on North Tyneside Council's Website and on the Tyne and Wear Homes website

#### 3. Consultation Results

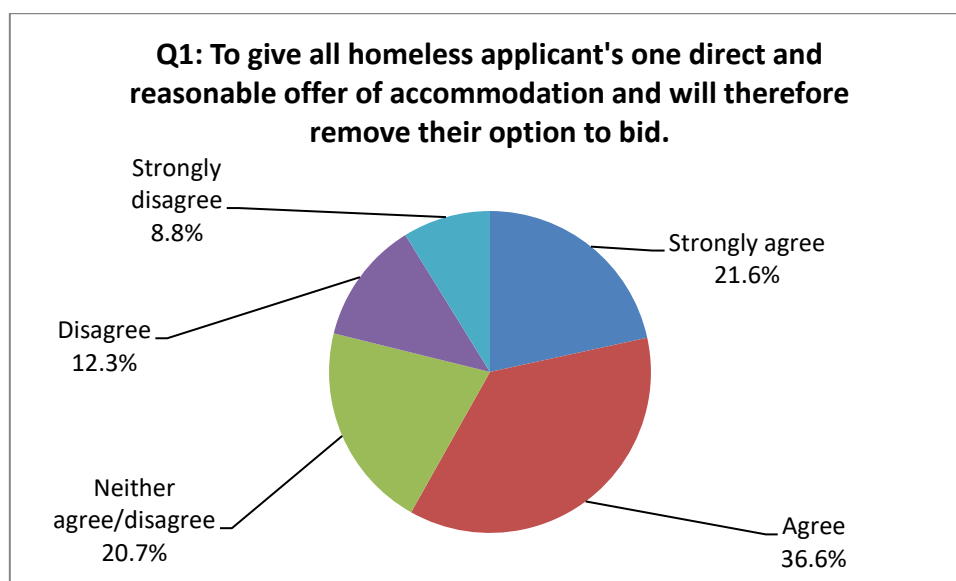
267 responses were received. The table below shows who responded. A full breakdown of the results is available upon request.

Applicant for a home	54
Current North Tyneside Council Tenant	101
Current tenant of another local authority	29
In another capacity	48
Other organisation	12
Registered Housing Provider	8
No information provided	15

### 3.1 Housing Offer to Homeless Applicants

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 places new duties on local authorities to prevent those at risk of homelessness, becoming homeless. This has resulted in people living in temporary accommodation longer, which can have a negative impact on them and their families, especially to their mental health and general wellbeing. We want to rehouse people most at risk as quickly as we can. The proposal below will allow us to rehouse homeless people and their families to do this, avoiding long stays in temporary accommodation.

**We are proposing to:** give all homeless applicants one reasonable offer in-line with legislation. When North Tyneside Council has a duty to rehouse a homeless person we are proposing to remove the applicant's choice to bid and will make them one direct and reasonable offer of suitable accommodation.



The results show that 58% of the respondents agreed with the proposal, whilst 21% disagreed and 21% had no opinion.

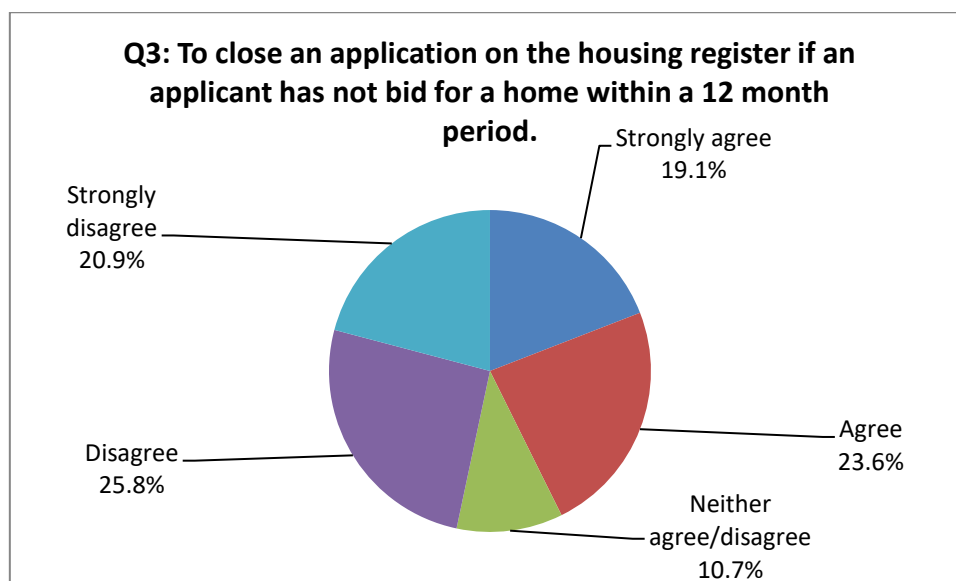
Comments	Response / Actions
Overall comments around this proposal were positive. Views were that those people in need should accept an offer of accommodation and that it did seem a fair and sensible approach, which in some cases could reduce the stress of homelessness applicants.	This proposal will be taken forward.

<p>The feedback highlighted a number of questions around this proposal and are shown below:-</p>	
<p>What is a reasonable offer of accommodation?</p>	<p>A reasonable offer is an offer of accommodation which is suitable for the household's needs, taking into consideration the size and type of property, any social circumstances and ensuring the applicant is not placed at any risk in the area.</p>
<p>Will the applicant be able to give an area of preference?</p> <p>What about people who are fleeing domestic abuse?</p> <p>This could result in people being placed somewhere they are not familiar with and depending on their mental state could make them homeless again.</p>	<p>Applicant's individual circumstances are considered and to ensure there is no risk in the area they are moving to. Most applicants are housed in their area of preference; however the Authority must make best use of its stock and match applicants to available homes, taking into consideration the overall effect of homelessness, both emotional and financial.</p> <p>The Authority will ensure that homeless applicants' direct lets, will not be all in one particular area of the borough.</p>
<p>People who are in crisis are being penalised by treating this group of people differently, it could cause further risk and hardship making the tenancy unsustainable.</p>	<p>Support will be in place from the Authority to help new tenants settle into their new home and sustain their tenancy.</p>
<p>Temporary accommodation needs to be improved, why are people in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time?</p>	<p>Households are in temporary accommodation for longer periods due to the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act (2017), which places new duties on local authorities to prevent or relieve homelessness, meaning the length of stay in temporary accommodation may be extended.</p>
<p>What happens if the applicant refuses the direct offer?</p> <p>Is there an appeals process?</p>	<p>All applicants have a right to request a review.</p>
<p>Maybe 2 offers of accommodation would work better and then a choice is still being given.</p>	<p>The council have taken this into consideration.</p>
<p>There were also comments around properties being in a poor state of repair</p>	<p>Every property should meet the Authority's Moving In Standard. Any outstanding repairs are discussed with the prospective tenant at the viewing and any new or additional repairs are reported.</p>

### 3.2 Closing in-active applications on the Housing Register

There are currently 3,868 applicants on North Tyneside Council's Housing Register. In the past 12 months 30% of applicants have not bid on any homes, with a majority not having bid at all since being registered. North Tyneside Council wants to ensure that the people on the Housing Register are those who need our homes the most. Our proposal will make sure that we allocate homes to those in most need.

**We are proposing to:** close an application on the Housing Register if an applicant has not bid for a home within a 12 month period.



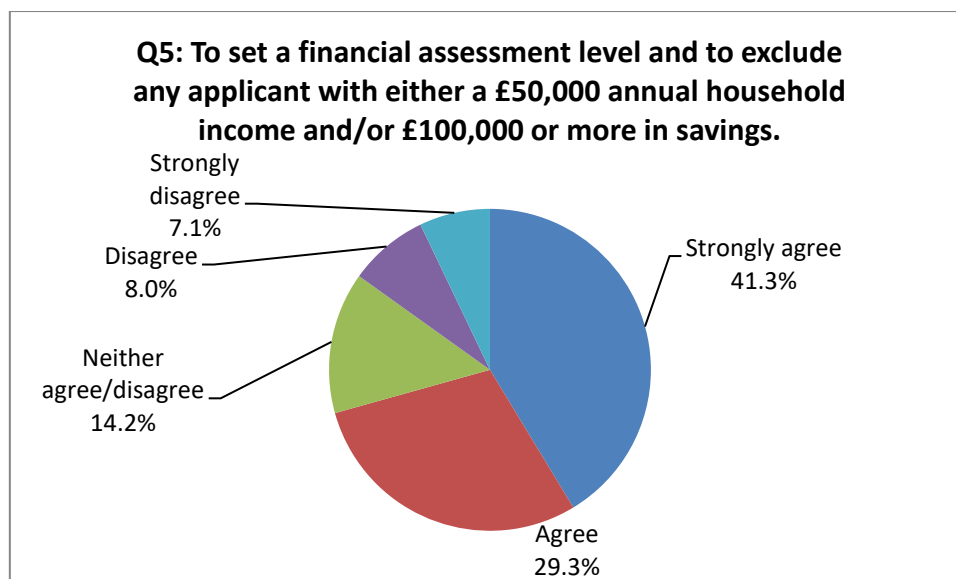
42.7% of respondents agreed with the proposal and 46.7% disagreed with the proposal

Comments	Response / Actions
Feedback on this proposal was negative.	This proposal will not be taken forward.

### 3.3 Taking applicant's income into account

Our current policy does not take applicant's financial income into account. We want to ensure that people on North Tyneside register are those most in need and are unable to privately rent or buy their own home.

**We are proposing to:** set a financial assessment level and to exclude any applicant with either a £50,000 annual household income or £100,000 or over in savings.



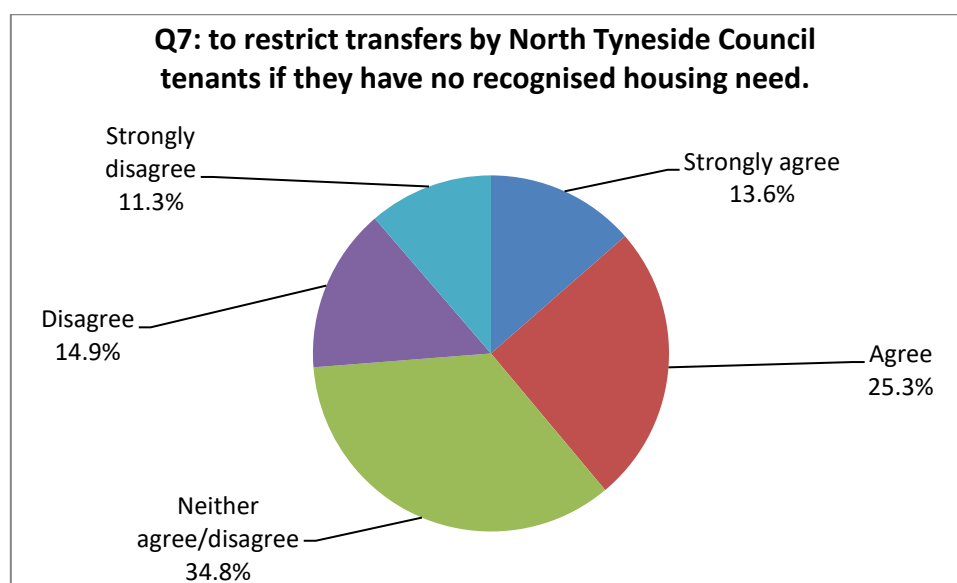
The results show that 70.6% agreed with the proposal, 14.2% were unsure and 15.1% of the respondents disagreed with the proposal.

Comments	Response / Actions
Overall feedback for this proposal was very positive and felt that social housing should be for people on lower incomes. There were also some comments that suggested that the threshold should be lower than what had been suggested.	This proposal will be taken forward
There were comments/questions that are addressed below:-	
What about people who may earn over £50,000 but have a large family with little disposable income?	Each case will be looked at individually and where there are exceptional circumstances this will be referred to a senior officer for consideration; however we feel that £50,000 is enough income to allow applicants to meet their own housing need.
Consideration needs to be given to people with specific circumstances such as disability, older people and other medical reasons.	The Authority will take exceptional circumstances into consideration.
What about people who pay child support?	A financial assessment will be carried out to determine individual circumstances.
This income may not be enough for someone to obtain a mortgage	A range of housing options will need to be considered.

### 3.4 Restrictions to Transfers

North Tyneside Council's current lettings policy is based around government legislation, giving those in most housing need priority. Once an applicant has been rehoused by us their housing needs are seen to have been met. To ensure we only have people on the register who have a housing need.

**We are proposing to:** restrict transfers by North Tyneside Council tenants if they have no recognised housing need. We are proposing that this restriction remains in place for a period of time.



39% of the respondents agreed with restricting transfers whilst 26.1% disagreed. However 34.8% seemed unsure with the proposal. Of those who agreed with the proposal, 3 years was the most favourable before an applicant could apply for a transfer.

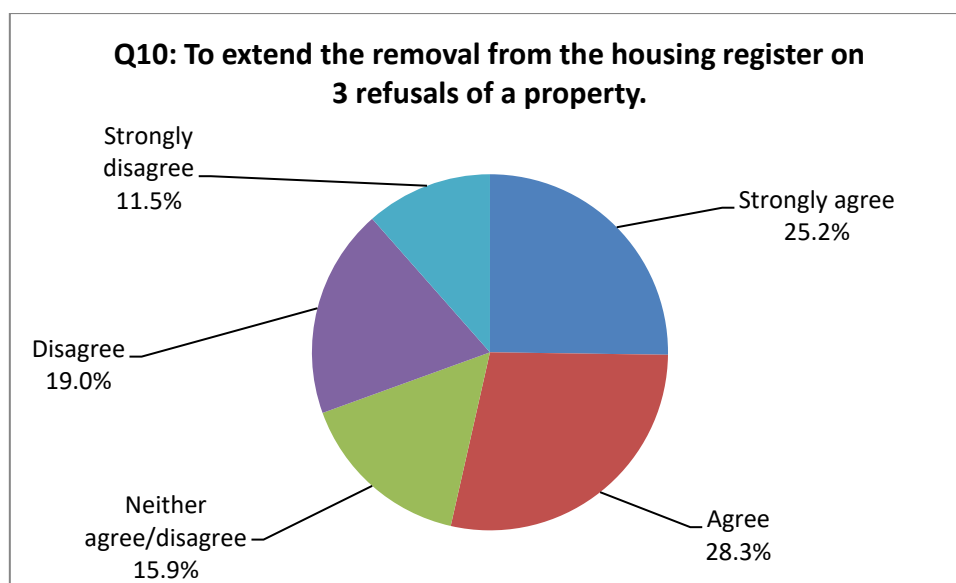
Comments	Response/Actions
<p>Overall people seemed to be in favour with this proposal, although many did not seem to have an opinion about this. Positive responses highlighted the importance of choosing the right property initially.</p> <p>Some issues/questions that came from the consultation are outlined below:-</p>	<p>To take this proposal forward, however to restrict to one year as opposed to three years. The reason for this is that once someone has been housed, their needs have been met. In addition, one year would demonstrate that a person could satisfactorily sustain their tenancy.</p>
<p>People's needs may change and a restriction should not be put in place.</p> <p>The reason for transfer should be a priority and not the number of years to restrict a tenant.</p>	<p>The restriction will only be for those who have no housing need and their current housing needs are being met by the home in which they live.</p> <p>If a person's needs change, a review will be completed.</p>

<p>Would this include mutual exchanges? People may use mutual exchanges more</p>	<p>If someone has been housed via a mutual exchange, then they would be restricted for a transfer, unless there are exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>They would still have a right to apply for a mutual exchange.</p>
<p>It costs a lot of money to re-house someone frequently causing a waste of money, time and resources if they have no housing need.</p>	<p>On average it costs the Authority over £3,000, plus administration costs to re-let a home.</p>

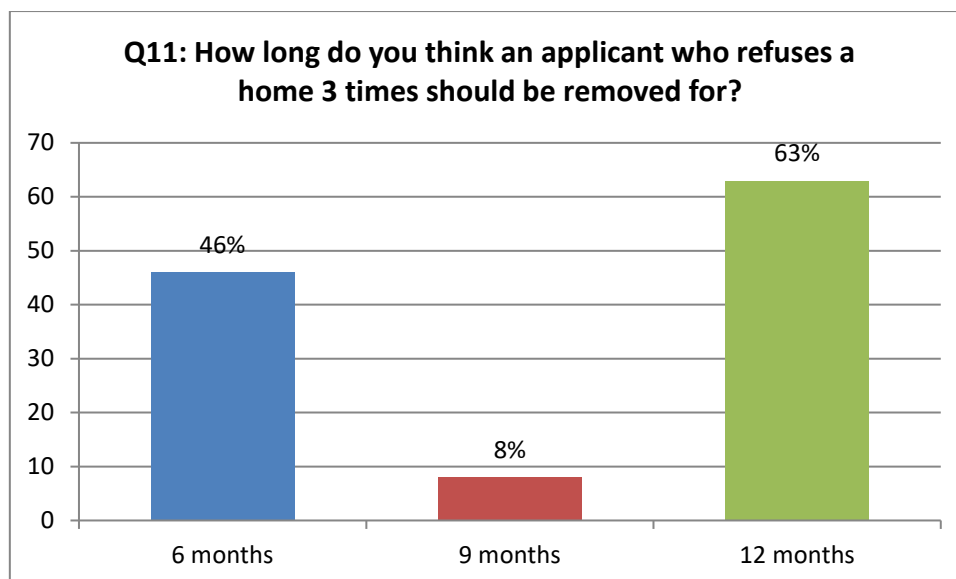
### 3.5 Suspension from the housing register on 3 refusals of a property

We receive a high volume of refusals on available homes. These refusals are made after the applicant has bid for the property of their choice. Refusals can add to the time that other people who are in housing need have to wait. Currently when an applicant refuses a property 3 times they are suspended from the housing register for a period of three months. To ensure we are helping people on our current housing register who are most in need.

**We propose to:** extend this suspension to a longer period of either 6, 9 or 12 months.



53.5% agreed with the proposal and 30.5% disagreed, 15.9% didn't have an opinion. 63% of respondents felt that applicants should be removed from the housing register for 12 months, whilst 46% thought 6 months, with 9 months being the less favourable with 9%.



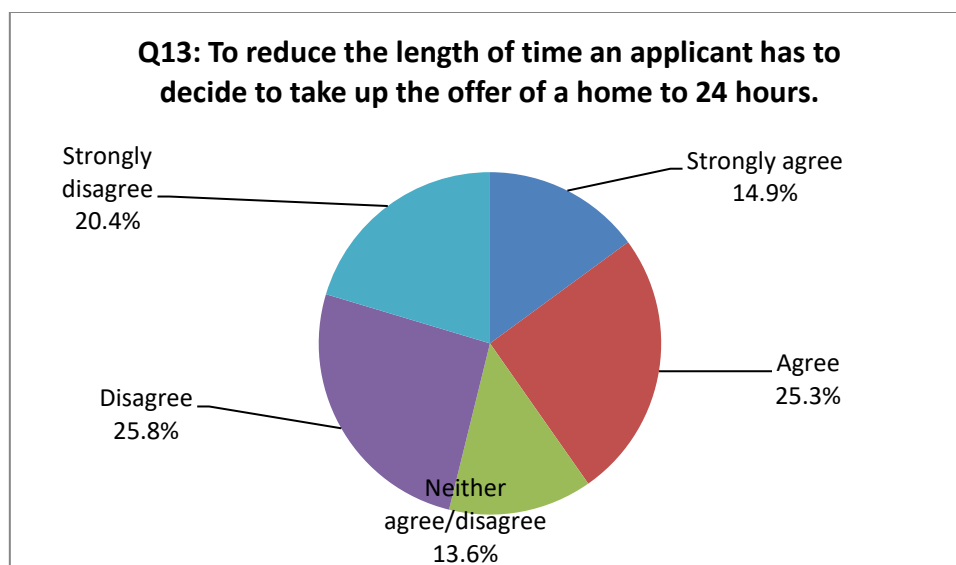
Comments	Response/ Action
<p>Over half of the respondents were in favour of this proposal and suggested that people are removed from the register for 12 months, as applicants would be more mindful when bidding for a home and be likely to bid on the property they want.</p> <p>There were some questions and concerns around this which are outlined below:-</p>	<p>To take this proposal forward with a 6 months suspension.</p> <p>This is a reasonable solution to an increasing issue which causes cost and delay, not only to the Authority but other applicants bidding on properties where offers are delayed due to people further up the shortlist refusing properties. It will tackle serial bidders and will allow those most in need to secure a home.</p> <p>Although 63% of respondents felt that a 12 month period would be appropriate, it was felt that 6 months would have a lesser impact on those most vulnerable.</p>
What about the state/condition of some properties?	All properties should meet the Moving In Standard.
Why are people refusing properties?	People often don't visit properties before bidding and/or viewing or simply just change their mind.
Would this apply to people who require adaptations/elderly?	Yes – most people requiring adaptations are pre-assessed by an Occupational Therapist and any potential properties are assessed for suitability before an offer is made.
Vulnerable people need more support	Individual circumstances will be considered.



### 3.6 Time available to decide to take up an offer of a home

A housing register applicant will have an informed choice to bid for the home they are interested in, for example they will have decided where they want to live and what type of accommodation they require. For most applicants it can then be up to 8 weeks before they can view the home they have bid for. After they have viewed the property, the applicant currently has 48 hours during which to decide whether to take up the offer of the home. We need to let our homes as quickly as possible, therefore...

**We propose to:** reduce length of time an applicant has to decide to take up the offer of a home to 24 hours.



Overall Respondents (46.2%) disagreed with this proposal, whilst 40.2% agreed and 13.6% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Comments	Response/Actions
More people disagreed with the proposal to reduce the decision time after viewing from 48 hours to 24.	This proposal will not be taken forward.