



REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 7 MARCH 2017

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF THE TENANT DOWNSIZING INCENTIVE SCHEME

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks the approval of Communities Committee to implement the revised Tenant Downsizing Incentive Scheme, following the consultation exercise undertaken with service users and stakeholders.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (F) (3) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the management of council housing.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Communities Committee:-

- (i) considers the feedback received from the consultation period;**
- (ii) approves the revised Tenant Downsizing Incentive Scheme, as set out in APPENDIX I, for implementation as detailed in Section 6; and**
- (iii) agrees that Officers will monitor the new arrangements during 2017/18 and provide a progress update early in 2018/19.**

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 On 8 November 2016, the Communities Committee agreed proposed changes to the Tenant Downsizing Incentive Scheme (paragraph 8 of the Minute refers). The key changes were:

- to increase of financial incentive offered as part of the Scheme to include a disruption element of £400 per transfer to cover unforeseen costs;
- to extend the Scheme to include tenants of wheelchair adapted accommodation. Tenants or qualifying occupiers would become eligible where the household no longer requires the adapted or specialist features of the house. There would be no requirement to consider under occupancy and all sizes of this type of property would be considered; and

- to increase the target number of households who can use the Scheme from 20 to 25 households each year.

3.2 The Committee agreed to a wider consultation of the revised Scheme and that an update on the consultation would be provided to this Committee.

4. CONSULTATION RESPONSES

4.1 The consultation ran from 14 November 2016 until 31 January 2017.

4.2 The following methods were used in the consultation:-

- a web-based survey was developed to seek feedback This was published with information explaining the amended Scheme on the Council website and was publicised via the Council's newsroom;
- feedback was sought from the Council's registered interested tenants, the Moray Tenant's Forum and Community Councils and an article was placed in the Tenant's Voice asking tenants to provide feedback;
- a survey and letter asking for feedback was sent to a random sample of over 300 tenants, including those who may be eligible for the Scheme; and
- feedback from equalities groups was sought through the Moray Equalities Forum.

4.3 The survey asked three key questions relating to the changes that were to be introduced under the revised Scheme. Does the respondent agree with:-

- i. increasing of the financial incentive to include a disruption element of £400;
- ii. extending the criteria to include tenants and qualifying occupiers of wheelchair adapted properties who no longer need to live in an adapted property; and
- iii. increasing the number of households who can use the Scheme from 20 households to 25 households.

Respondents were all invited to provide any additional comments that they may have on each question.

5. CONSULTATION RESPONSES

5.1 A total of 62 responses were received. This constituted a response rate of 21% of surveys issued. 76% of these were in response to the letter and survey sent.

5.2 The feedback received was supportive of the tenant downsizing incentive scheme and can be summarised as follows:

- Increasing the financial incentive to include a disruption element of £400

74% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the proposed changes. 14% of respondents disagreed and 12% were undecided.

- Extending of the criteria to include tenants and qualifying occupiers of wheelchair adapted properties
63% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the proposed changes. 25% of respondents were undecided and 12% disagreed.
- Increasing the target number of households who can use the Scheme from 20 to 25 household per annum
72% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the proposed changes. 19 % of respondents were undecided and 9% disagreed.

5.3 Thirteen respondents provided additional comments as part of the consultation process. Several themes were identified:

- tenants should not be pressured or forced to move;

The Downsizing Incentive Scheme remains voluntary. The Council cannot – and would not want to force tenants who are under occupying their homes to move against their will. The purpose of the Scheme is to encourage and empower those tenants and qualifying occupiers who are eligible for the Scheme to move by providing assistance – both financial and practical.

- some respondents felt that moving home costs more than the £400 disruption element; and

The £400 disruption element is not intended to cover all the costs involved with moving. It is intended to help cover the cost and disruption of moving and unforeseen costs. The financial incentives offered as part of the Scheme compare favourably with those offered by other local authorities.

- there is a need for sensitivity in cases where the request follows the loss of family member.

There is a requirement on all housing staff to treat tenants and/or qualified occupiers with respect and dignity in the normal course of their daily duties. A dedicated officer has now been identified to support the Downsizing Incentive Scheme and the Service will maintain the highest standards when dealing with cases where a bereavement has occurred.

5.4 Following public consultation on the revised Scheme there is no need to make any further changes. A final version of the Scheme is provided as **APPENDIX I** for this Committees approval.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An annual budget of £72k to support the Scheme was included in the Housing Revenue Budget Report for 2017/18 and was approved by Full Council on 15 February 2017 (Paragraph 8 of the draft Minute refers.)

7. IMPLEMENTATION

- 7.1 Subject to this Committee's approval, the revised Downsizing Incentive Scheme will go live on 3 April 2017. As part of the implementation process, the Scheme will be re-launched on the council's website, through social media and an article on the Scheme will also be included in the next edition of the Tenants' Voice.
- 7.2 Officers will implement monitoring arrangements to ensure that downsizing is prioritised in the year ahead. A report providing a progress update will be presented to this Committee in early 2018/19.

8. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Moray 2026: A Plan for the Future and Moray Corporate Plan 2015 - 2017

Moray 2026 and the Moray Corporate Plan identify the need to address the shortage of housing and tackle homelessness. The revised Downsizing Incentive Scheme seeks to make best use of the Council's housing stock and promotes healthier citizens and adults living healthier, sustainable independent lives safeguarded from harm.

(b) Policy and Legal

The legislative framework for the Council's Allocation Policy is contained within the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended.

(c) Financial Implications

The budget to support the Downsizing Incentive Scheme was approved as part of the Housing Revenue Account annual budget 2017/18. This budget will be used to maximise downsizing transfers and will be closely monitored to ensure that downsizing is prioritised in the year ahead.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no risks immediately arising from this report.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing issues arising from this report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications arising directly from this report.

(g) Equalities

The Equality Act 2010 supersedes all previous equalities legislation. An equality impact assessment for the revised Scheme has been completed. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

(h) Consultations

Consultations on this report have been carried out with housing managers, the Principal Accountant (Deborah O'Shea), Senior Solicitor – Property and Contracts (Kathryn Macpherson), the Committee Services Officer (Lissa Rowan) and the Equal Opportunities Officer (Don Toonan) who agree the contents.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 This report presents details on the public consultation on the draft Downsizing Incentive Scheme. There is no further need to change the draft leading from the consultation and a final version is presented to this Committee for approval. If approved, it is intended to implement the revised Scheme from 3 April 2017. A report providing a progress update will be presented to this Committee in early 2018/19.**

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Background Papers: With author
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