

Proposal for an item to be included in Scrutiny Work Programme

Action required:

That members of the Scrutiny Committee consider whether to include the proposed item in their work programme for 2016/17.

Background

At the December 2015 SSDC Full Council meeting Councillor Nick Colbert tabled a Motion asking that the current Homefinder Somerset scoring system be amended for South Somerset applications to give higher priority to family, school and work commitments within a local area, thus maintaining family support networks and supporting sustainable local communities.

The Motion was extensively debated by the members present at Full Council with the Housing and Welfare Manager informing members of the wide ranging implications of adopting such a measure and seeking to assure members that the current allocations policy does recognise the importance of local connections. On several occasions during the debate, it was suggested that the Motion be amended to allow for the matter to be referred to Scrutiny for a more detailed discussion of the complex issues involved. This suggestion reflects the considerable work that Scrutiny did with Homefinder Somerset initially and the knowledge and expertise that members have developed.

Councillor Colbert did not amend his Motion and so the original Motion as tabled was voted on by Members and defeated. In the closing moments of the debate, members were informed that if they wished the matter to be considered by Scrutiny, a request should be submitted to the Committee in line with the established processes.

Subsequently, such a request has been received from Councillors Jason Baker and Val Keitch, asking that Scrutiny considers establishing a Task and Finish Group to work with the relevant officers, interested Scrutiny members and the Portfolio Holder(s) to investigate this matter in more detail before making a report back to Scrutiny.

If such a review is commissioned by the Scrutiny Committee, members may wish to consider the following points in agreeing the scope of this piece of work:

- Clarify existing allocations/scoring policies and the 'weighting' given to local connections – how well are current scoring arrangements communicated?
- Is it possible to introduce local variations to the Somerset Wide scheme?
- Are there any legal/financial/ reputational/equality implications to adopting local variations.
- Review the percentage of Market Town allocations given to those demonstrating a local connection within the last 12 months.

Recommended way forward

If members of the Scrutiny Committee agree that this issue warrants further investigation, the most appropriate way forward would be to establish a Task and Finish Group with the

very specific remit of looking at the implications of amending current HomeFinder Somerset allocations policy to give a higher priority to 'local connections'.

Based on initial discussions with the relevant service manager, this work should ideally be completed by April 2016. with a report back to Scrutiny in March 2016.
