

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee: Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee	Dated: 28/11/2024
Subject: Decants Policy and Crescent House Local Decants Policy	Public report: For Decision
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes • provides statutory duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Engaged Communities • Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	
Report author: Liam Gillespie, Head of Housing Management, Department of Community and Children's Services (Housing Division)	

Summary

A 'decant' takes place when a tenant is moved temporarily or permanently to an alternative property, to enable repair, redevelopment or renovation work to take place. This situation is covered by our Decants Policy, which was first approved by this Sub-Committee in April 2016 prior to the project to rehouse residents of Mais House in Sydenham Hill, which was later demolished.

The Decants Policy has been amended to cover different types of decant and to reflect key learning from the Housing Ombudsman, following their investigations into other landlords' handling of decant processes.

As part of the work to prepare for the project to refurbish and repair windows at the 145 homes in Crescent House on Golden Lane Estate, a local decants policy for that project has been drafted and is submitted for Member approval.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Approve the Decant Policy
- Approve the Crescent House Local Decant Policy

Main Report

Background

1. The process by which residents are rehoused temporarily or permanently to enable repairs, major works or redevelopment, is often referred to as 'decanting'. Landlords have clear legal obligations in these situations, and the Housing Division's Decants Policy outlines our approach to ensuring that we meet these obligations. It also explains our commitment to providing the necessary support and advice to residents, to limit disruption and distress to residents as far as possible.
2. The Decants Policy was first approved in April 2016, as part of the project to redevelop the Mais House sheltered housing site at Sydenham Hill. As that project involved the permanent rehousing of residents, the policy concentrated on how the City Corporation would handle that kind of scenario.

Current Position

3. The policy has now been reviewed under the three-yearly cycle, and in anticipation of the Crescent House windows project. It has been updated to cover three situations more clearly:
 - Emergency decants (for instance, to allow urgent repairs where the tenant cannot remain in occupation)
 - Planned temporary decants
 - Planned permanent decants
4. We are conscious that the process of moving home, whether temporarily or permanently, is potentially very disruptive to individual residents and can be distressing. The policy explains how we will communicate with and support residents during the process, to address their concerns and ensure that they are kept informed at each stage.
5. The Housing Ombudsman recently published a summary of key learning from complaints about how social landlords have handled decants, and those recommendations are reflected in the revised policy. They include:
 - Ensuring that residents have a named contact during the process and are regularly updated

- Making sure that the temporary accommodation is suitable at the outset, for both the resident's needs and the duration of the decant, and remains suitable depending on any changing circumstances
 - Landlords must communicate effectively with affected residents and provide information on key matters such as any financial allowances due
6. Our obligations differ in some respects between tenants and leaseholders (for example, in relation to emergency decants). The Decant Policy therefore applies to Secure tenants, however provision is made for project-specific local policies to be created, which can extend help and support to leaseholders and sub-tenants also as required.

Crescent House Windows Project

7. The Crescent House windows project will involve 'planned temporary' decanting of households in phases, to enable works to be carried out to groups of properties systematically. Affected residents will return to their homes once work is complete, however some tenants with a current housing application may be assisted to find a suitable alternative home prior to the decanting process beginning.
8. The phased decanting of Crescent House is a complex matter and will require careful planning and management. It is appreciated that the process of moving into temporary accommodation is disruptive and potentially distressing for residents, and it is important that we listen and respond to their concerns about how the project will affect them individually.
9. The Crescent House project will require us to treat all tenures equally and provide the same offer to tenants, leaseholders and lawful sub-tenants. A Local Decant Policy has therefore been drafted to cover the Crescent House windows project, which Members are requested to approve.
10. The policy outlines the general approach to the Crescent House project. The detail on how the project will be delivered, including the support and assistance to be provided to residents, will be fully outlined in a decant scheme or plan. This will address the more specific logistical matters about how the process will be managed and will be developed with resident input, to ensure that their concerns and priorities are understood and addressed.

Recommendations

11. Members are requested to approve both the main Decants Policy and the project-specific Crescent House Local Decants Policy.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

The Decants Policy will support consistent and legally compliant project delivery, and the Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcome of Delivering Excellent Services. Both the Decants Policy and Crescent House Local Decants Policy provide for planning and decision-making in conjunction with residents, and therefore support the outcome of Diverse, Engaged Communities.

Financial implications

None.

Resource implications

None.

Legal implications

The Decants Policy sets out how we will meet our legal obligations, however there are no direct legal implications in the decisions Members are requested to make.

Risk implications

None.

Equalities implications

The policies provide for an assessment of residents' individual needs as part of any decanting activity, and this will support officers in fulfilling Equality Act 2010 duties.

Climate implications

None.

Security implications

None.

Conclusion

12. The Decants Policy has been reviewed and amended to cover additional scenarios in why residents might be required to move home temporarily or permanently to facilitate repairs, major works or redevelopments affecting their homes.
13. The policy provides for the creation of scheme-specific policies to support specific projects. As part of the planning for the Crescent House windows project, which will require works to be completed while residents are temporarily housed elsewhere, a local decants policy has been drafted for Member approval.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Decants Policy
- Appendix 2 – Crescent House Local Decants Policy

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