

## Housing Acquisitions Policy

### Version control

Avoid referring to printed versions of this document. Printed versions may be out of date.

<b>Owner/responsibility for compliance</b>		Head of Housing Commissioning and Strategy	
<b>Status (draft / approved &amp; live)</b>		Approved and live	
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1.1	11 December 2024	Cabinet	New policy

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy supports Swindon Borough Council's (the Council) strategic aims for acquiring homes to meet local housing need.
- 1.2 This policy sets out the different methods of acquisition, how the Council will assess housing need for acquisitions, and the criteria for decision-making when pursuing or rejecting each acquisition opportunity.
- 1.3 This policy also sets out how acquired homes may be utilised.

## 2 Aims/objectives

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to outline how the Council delivers affordable housing through its Housing Delivery Programme.
- 2.2 In addition to this, the Council will consider acquiring properties on new build schemes through Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) planning agreements or elsewhere via the open market.
- 2.3 The Council aims to deliver homes through acquisitions to meet specific housing demand by location, property type and size.
- 2.4 The acquisition of homes through this policy will help improve access to council homes across the borough in order to meet local housing needs.
- 2.5 The Policy provides a policy framework for assessing viability and value for money to guide the decision-making process, but not does impart any obligations upon the Council.

## 3 Methods of acquisition

- 3.1 The majority of the Council's acquisitions will be based on approaches made by members of the public offering the Council the opportunity to acquire properties.

- 3.2 The Council will actively seek properties to acquire that meet current housing need on the open market.
- 3.3 A proposed acquisition will only be progressed if the criteria are met and the relative financial benefits can be demonstrated. The key criteria are as follows:
- A property which has had, or is particularly suitable for, significant disabled adaptations which would meet the needs of an identified applicant with disabilities.
  - Housing need and demand has been established for the type of asset being offered and the area in which it is located.
  - The cost of any refurbishment work required to bring the asset up to the Council's Lettable Standard (or other relevant minimum standard), including energy efficiency upgrades is financially viable.
  - A property in specific demand at any time – i.e.; larger properties (four or more bedrooms) suitable for larger households, one-bedroom dwellings suitable for downsizing.
  - An existing market unit on one of the new build development sites, where this could increase the balance of affordable housing provision on the site.
  - Leasehold flats, where the Council is the freeholder, reducing the risk to the Housing Revenue Account, for example in the identification and subsequent collection of Section 20 charges (the notice requiring a leaseholder to contribute towards the service charges, as established by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985).
  - A property in a specific location that could free up land or access to land, or otherwise facilitate affordable housing development.
  - A property where the location lends itself to ease of housing management and maintenance, but could be outside of our traditional housing estates.
  - Council homes sold through the Right to Buy scheme that are outside the Right of First Refusal period. The Council is occasionally offered former Council homes where there is no statutory obligation for the current occupant to do so.
  - Disposals from Housing Associations that are offered to the Council. The Council is offered properties from Housing Associations on an infrequent basis due to low demand and/or cost of refurbishment. The Council will consider these offers in areas of strategic importance.
  - New build properties that are not part of Section 106 agreements. These are offered to the Council on an ad-hoc basis but are usually at full market value.
  - S106 acquisitions secured via planning policy as detailed in the Affordable Housing Position Statement and are limited to geographical areas where there are developments large enough to provide affordable housing.

## **4 Property Assessment**

- 4.1 All purchases may be viewed and inspected by a Council employee or representative, for example, surveyor.
- 4.2 All purchases will be subject to an independent survey including a valuation, and all compliance certifications.
- 4.3 The Energy Performance Certificate will be reviewed to ensure the property meets the required energy efficiency standards.

### **Value for money**

- 4.4 The Council will offer the market valuation for properties and will consider the cost of other similar recent acquisitions when decision making.
- 4.5 The assessment criteria will identify priorities for acquisition, but the Council has the right to reject any offer for any reason.

## **5 Properties the Council will not consider**

- 5.1 The Council will not consider properties that:
  - Have sitting tenants.
  - Are leasehold, except for flats where the block is in Council ownership and there are existing Council rent tenancies in the block.
  - Are shared ownership.
  - Has extensions, conversions, or additional works without the necessary certificates or permissions from planning or building control.
  - Have a homeowner wishing to stay in the property as a tenant.
  - Have a significant issue with anti-social behaviour in the area.
  - Requires significant investment to obtain Energy Performance Certificate band C or better.
- 5.2 Any offer that meets the above criteria will be automatically rejected.
- 5.3 In all cases, the Council has the right to cancel any acquisition at any stage before contracts are exchanged and will not pay any compensation to the homeowner. Each party will bear the cost of their respective legal, valuation and administration fees.

## **6 Post-acquisition**

- 6.1 All acquisitions will become part of the Council's Housing Revenue Account stock.
- 6.2 Once incorporated into the stock portfolio, acquired homes will be made available in accordance with the current Housing Allocation Policy, as accommodation to support the Council's statutory homelessness duties, or to meet another identified housing need (e.g. to support the Council's Children Act duties to provide accommodation).
- 6.3 The Council may utilise the Direct Let provisions in the Allocation Policy, for example where a property has been acquired to meet the needs of a specific household.

6.4 Data regarding the construction and physical characteristics of the property will be collated and supplied to the Asset Manager.

6.5 The Asset Manager will assign an age to each respective component in the Decent Homes Standard within the property, so these can be factored into future capital renewal schemes of works.

## **7 Decision making**

7.1 All decisions require the approval of:

- Asset Manager.
- Head of Housing Customer Services.
- Voids Operations Manager or Voids Senior Surveyor.
- Finance.
- Tenancy Services.
- Voids & Lettings Service Manager or Allocations & Lettings Operations Manager.
- Cabinet Member for Housing.
- The Council's Legal team.

## **8 Finance**

8.1 Housing acquisition opportunities will only be pursued if there is funding available at the time it is offered, and the Council has the right to refuse any housing acquisition opportunity where no funding is available at that time.

8.2 The budget position will be reported to Cabinet annually as part of the Housing development programme.

## **9 Monitoring and review**

9.1 This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if legislation or regulations change.