

## For publication

### Allocations Policy and IT System update

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Meeting: Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019

Cabinet portfolio: Councillor Chris Ludlow

Report by: Assistant Director for Housing

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<b>Purpose of reviewing the topic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To oversee the implementation of the Council's new Allocation Policy and IT system for managing the Housing Register.</li></ul>
<b>What are the objectives of the review?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To review the impact of the new Home Options Allocations Policy.</li><li>• To review and consider the proposed improvements made by using a new IT system</li><li>• To consider the customer experience of the bidding and lettings process</li></ul>
<b>Progress to date</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New item on the work programme</li></ul>

#### 1.0 **Background**

1.1 In 2018 the council conducted a full review of the Allocations Policy and the IT system used to deliver the choice-based lettings system for allocating properties.

1.2 The review resulted in the identification of a number of operational issues with the existing policy including:

- 12-month residency requirement
- Pre-allocation risk assessment

- Existing tenant transfers
- Points-based system of awarding priority
- Property size eligibility (number of bedrooms)
- Property size eligibility (number of bedrooms) during pregnancy
- Equity
- Adaptations

1.3 Each of the above listed issues were found to be excessively restrictive in terms of enabling allocation of accommodation to those most in need and by preventing the council from having a full and active housing register.

1.4 The Home Options Policy was approved on the basis that it would attract the following benefits:

- An on-line rehousing application
- Introduction of a simplified priority band system
- Ability to assess medical need using category groups
- Revision of residency requirement criteria
- Acceptance of out of borough applicants on to the housing register
- Introduction of an equity assessment
- Introduction of a time restriction on reapplying to the housing register after being rehoused
- Revision of property size (number of bedrooms) eligibility criteria.
- Introduction of a pre-allocation financial assessment of affordability.
- Revision of housing register exclusion times and financial levels.
- Alignment of the Allocations Policy with the Adaptations Policy 2017.

1.5 The IT system that the council used to manage the housing register and deliver the choice based letting service was out of date and no longer fit for purpose. In

addition to this the system could not be updated with the current supplier due a number of previously issued upgrades that had not been implemented by the council.

1.6 The procurement and acquisition of a new system, Locata, was approved. The benefits of the Locata system include:

- Online application process
- Continuous updates to ensure information held is up to date and accurate
- Cloud based storage
- Instant shortlisting of successful applicants
- Email notifications for customers
- Mobile device responsive to enable easy bidding

1.7 It was felt that both the policy and the out of date IT system were no longer fit for purpose and were providing for a very poor customer experience when applying for and bidding on council properties.

1.8 On the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2018 a report was presented to Cabinet seeking permission to consult upon a new Allocations Policy and IT system for managing the housing list.

1.9 Cabinet approved the recommendation resulting in a 6 week consultation programme with members, existing applicants, council tenants and key stakeholders.

1.10 A further report was presented to Cabinet on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018 presenting the feedback from the consultation process and recommending the approval to implement the new Allocations Policy and IT system.

1.11 Cabinet approved the recommendations and a final paper was presented to full council on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Council approved the following recommendations on that date:

- That members note the feedback from consultation and approve implementation of the Home Options Policy, incorporating local differences for Chesterfield.
- That Cabinet recommend to full council the adoption of the new Home Options Policy.
- To rescind the Local Lettings Plan approved in June 2017.
- That any minor operational amendments to the Home Options Policy be approved by the Cabinet member for Homes and Customers and the Assistant Director for Housing

1.12 The implementation of the new allocations policy included the council joining the Derbyshire Home Options Partnership consisting of five other local authorities in Derbyshire.

## 2.0 **Current position and key milestones**

2.1 Since the approval by full council in December 2018 officers have been liaising with the service providers for the new IT system, Locata over the developments and specification to enable them to deliver the requirements of the new allocations policy.

2.2 The original aim was for both the system and policy to be implemented between May 2019 and June 2019.

2.3 Due to staffing resource issues within the legal team at Derbyshire Dales District Council, who are the lead authority for the Derbyshire Home Options Partnership, there has been considerable delay in formalising the legal documentation partnership agreement to a position where all 6 partners are able to sign.

2.4 This issue was raised with senior management within Derbyshire Dales District Council without success.

- 2.5 In order to overcome any additional delays and disruption to service an agreement was reached where the council have implemented temporary interim agreements to ensure that all legal requirements relating to GDPR are met.
- 2.6 This has enabled the council to “go live” with the new allocations policy and choice-based lettings system from 19<sup>th</sup> November 2019.
- 2.7 At the time of writing the number of applications on the new system is 1168 but this is increasing each day following the previous allocations system no longer being available.
- 2.8 A communications plan including briefing notes for staff and councillors is being developed together with additional support and information for applicants.
- 3.0 **Barriers/obstacles**
- 3.1 There have been very few issues or concerns raised by customers so far. Staff have been trained on the new system and specifically how to support customers who are not confident to process their application online themselves.
- 3.2 The main outstanding issue is that of the legal documentation which remains with the legal team in Derbyshire Dales District Council to review.
- 3.3 Every effort is being made to reach a solution to this issue as soon as possible.
- 4.0 **Conclusion**

- 4.1 There have been a number of lessons learned over the implementation process however the only remaining barrier as mentioned above is one that is not within our control.
- 4.2 The decision to find a solution to this issue and to proceed with implementation was a positive decision made in order to ensure a continuity of service and a better customer experience when searching and applying for a council property.
- 5.0 **Suggested scrutiny activity**
- 5.1 Report back in 6 and 12 months with further data and evidence to enable a more in-depth review of the impacts of the policy and IT system.

### **Document information**

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<b>Background documents</b>	
None	
<i>This must be made available to the public for up to 4 years.</i>	
<b>Appendices to the report</b>	
Appendix A	