

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Select Move

Thursday, 18 July 2013

Present: Councillor Graham Dunn (Chair), Councillor (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Alison Hansford, Hasina Khan, Paul Leadbetter, June Molyneaux, Steve Murfitt and Paul Walmsley

Also in attendance

Officers: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Partnership, Planning and Policy), Zoe Whiteside (Head of Housing), Stuart Dewhurst (Housing Options Team Leader) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

13.TG.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

13.TG.2 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

13.TG.3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON SELECT MOVE

The Group received a presentation that provided background information on Select Move so that Members could effectively scope the review. A wide range of documentation was also circulated that included, a paper copy of the application form, and a copy of the latest newsletter that advertised all the available properties on the market at that point in time.

Select Move is a Choice Based Letting Partnership that replaced traditional waiting lists. Applicants express their interest with 'bids' on a weekly cycle rather than waiting to be allocated a property. The scheme allows choice and promotes sustainable communities as householders are more likely to stay in a property that they have chosen.

The current partnership consists of the three central Lancashire authorities of Chorley, Preston and South Ribble. Along with a number of Registered Providers that are in existence across all three boroughs.

The Partners are governed by a Steering Group that is responsible for the strategic overview of the scheme with senior representative from all the partners attending. An operational Group also meets to discuss and suggest improvement related operational issues and procedures.

Members were informed that the Select Move process was an online product and that the team had started to see a much greater use of the online bidding facility. Applications could either be submitted online or by paper form. Relevant evidence to support the application needed to be supplied upon request and any supporting documentation provided including references if required.

Applicants are banded from A to E dependant on need. A, being urgent and E, being no housing need. Applicants can then bid each week Saturday to Wednesday on newly advertised properties, with shortlisting and allocations being made on Thursday and Friday. Additional checks were sometimes undertaken by the registered providers, including affordability and home visits.

There were no penalties incurred by the customer if they did not accept or pulled out of any allocation.

Customers were able to log on direct, using their individual account details. Any customer could however, still request to be included on a paper mailing list that was distributed on a weekly basis.

Members did have some concerns that the mailing list may not reach people in time; especially in the rural areas and that customers would not have adequate time to bid, with the whole process having to be completed within a week. It was explained that each applicant only needed to complete one paper application form detailing their requirements and need; they could then request Council officers to bid on any property on their behalf. The officers also flagged up certain properties to people who they knew fulfilled the relevant criteria, so that they didn't miss out on the opportunity. Applicants could opt to choose the provider who manages their application and Members asked if this would lead to inconsistencies in banding in the absence of a prescribed tick list. Officers gave assurances that that the processes everyone undertook were the same and they had confidence that the results would be the same across the board.

Members were shown the online customer view. Properties could be searched on using bedroom size, local authority area and type. Links to other information were available and icons at the foot of the advert, clearly demonstrated the number of bedrooms, age restrictions, off road parking, adaptations, garden and if pets were allowed.

The only concern that Members had was the absence of a relevant picture(s) on the advert for the property which did appear to be the usual case. It was explained that on most occasions, the property is still tenanted and that existing residents do not want a picture of their property shown. The advert would list the street but not the number. The Council did try to encourage the registered providers to show a similar house picture to the one being advertised.

The back office screen shot provide information on the shortlisting processes of the scheme. Reasons were sought as to why some applicants status's were listed as skipped, and a variety of explanation were given that included under occupancy.

Although there were a number of people who had moved into the area who had a local connection to the town, it was explained that this was a two way process that had seen people moving to Preston and South Ribble for similar reasons. For example, the Clayton Brook area of the town was situated on the borders of both Preston and South Ribble.

Waiting lists were very difficult to quantify due to the reliance on customers bidding and the average waiting time of those housed, was 48 weeks in 2012/13, an increase from 44.2% in 2011/12. Customers waiting for 2 bedroomed properties' had the longest wait in 2012/13 with 56.4%, an increase of 7 weeks from 2011/12. In 19% of households, the oldest applicant is 25, 44% under 35 and 69% under 49. 31% of households have the oldest applicant over 50, almost 18% over 60 and just 9% over 70. Members were interested to know how long some people had been on the waiting list but had not actually bid or for what reasons they had refused or pulled of property allocations.

All social housing must meet the Decent Homes Standards (target 2010) although the condition is often not known at the time as there is usually a tenant in the property. Properties are advertised early by the registered providers to avoid them being empty for long periods, and making best use of their stock. Customers are fully able to inspect the properties before accepting an offer and any work needed to bring the property up to standard would be carried out before the tenant moves in.

Members were concerned about these standards as they had experiences of the properties being let to tenants in extremely poor condition. Some providers offered

tenants a DIY grant to carry out any works that consisted of £50 for a whole house which was considered to be totally inadequate.

There had been some main policy changes that affected applicants applying under the local connection criteria, under occupiers by one bedroom and over-occupancy households, Adopters/Foster carers and people in the Armed Forces.

Other changes and improvements hopefully coming before the end of the year would include new branding for the website that would promote easier use and a mobile site for access through any smart phone.

13.TG.4 SCOPING THE REVIEW

Members discussed several areas where issues had been raised throughout the presentation and these were fed into the scoping of the review.

Objectives

To investigate and evidence whether Select Move is meeting the needs and satisfaction of customers and they are happy with the outcomes.

To gather and understand in more detail information relating to current waiting times including the impact on particular bands/groups of customers and what actions, if any, can be taken to reduce waiting times.

To investigate and evidence all properties being let are in an acceptable standard on handover to the tenant and if not, what if anything can be done to address this.

Desired Outcomes

A choice based lettings service that meets the needs of Chorley residents.

Identify areas of improvement on condition of property at handover.

Reduced waiting times and lists.

Members were keen to ensure that all the seven equality and diversity strands were fully taken into consideration throughout the review and were keen to work effectively in partnership with the registered providers to facilitate any improvements across the board.

AGREED:

That the information be compiled into a draft scoping document in consultation with the Chair for consideration at the next meeting of the group.

That further information where possible is gathered and presented to the next meeting on the breakdown of the waiting list by the seven equality strands; the waiting times by band particularly those banded A and B and client group and to provide the feedback received from the previous survey of customers using Select Move.

Chair