

Minutes of **Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Select Move 2021**

Meeting date **Tuesday, 15 February 2022**

Members present: Councillor June Molyneaux (Chair), Councillor Sarah Ainsworth (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Steve Holgate, Hasina Khan, James Nevett and Kim Snape

Officers: Jennifer Mullin (Director of Communities), Rachel Stewart (Housing Solutions Manager), Suzanne Ravenscroft (Housing Options Team Leader) Matthew Pawlyszyn (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillor Christine Turner

Other Members: Councillor Julia Berry, Councillor Nweeda Khan (Preston City Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Social Justice), and John Cameron (Preston City Council's Senior Housing Advisory Officer)

10 Minutes of Meeting Thursday, 6 January 2022 of Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Select Move 2021

Decision: The minutes were approved as a correct record.

11 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations.

12 Discussion with Representatives from South Ribble Borough Council and Preston City Council

The Chair welcomed Suzanne Ravenscroft – South Ribble's Housing Options Team Leader. Councillor Nweeda Khan - Preston City Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Social Justice, and John Cameron Preston City Council's Senior Housing Advisory Officer to the Task Group.

It was confirmed that no Council in the partnership held a 'difficult to let' list, however, registered partners themselves were able to track and monitor performance.

It was uncertain as to which demographic used Select Move the most, each property listed on Select Move revealed the number of expressed interests. Two and three bedroom properties were the highest sought after, with triple digits of interest, one bedroom flats were often below 20 expressed interests. It was noted that as new

properties were added daily, this assessment reflected the time when the site was accessed.

Select Move featured new build homes, although the criteria and allocation was heavily regulated and tied into the development's Section 106, which on occasion required the property to be listed multiple times, and subsequently listed outside the Partnership.

Members discussed the definition of the 'local connection' and raised examples that required clarification. It was felt that there was a misconception and belief that properties had been rented without a local connection to the borough. The local connection criteria included having immediate family or employment in the borough. Consideration and support were given for homeless referrals, armed forces members, and those fleeing domestic abuse and violence.

Properties were listed on Select Move for five days, there was no set day and time properties were added, and users were frequently advised to check throughout the week for newly listed properties.

Members raised concerns that a significant number of properties on Select Move did not have pictures and questioned if users were bidding blind on properties. It was clarified that stock photos would be used where possible, but there was a small turnaround between one tenant leaving and the next moving in, it would be difficult to maintain accurate and up to date pictures. There were also privacy and safety concerns with the exact location of the property being identifiable. It was acknowledged that efforts would be made to encourage Registered Providers to use photos where possible. No user of Select Move was expected to blindly bid, every property was available to view before signing, and the user was able to refuse the property as Select Move was a choice-based service. However, three rejections would reduce their place on the list. Users that were inactive for six months would be notified that they risk being moved down the list, it was acknowledged that sometimes contact had been made retroactively, a practice that was encouraged to cease.

In relation to potential applicants that came with challenges, including but not limited to anti-social behaviour and rent arrears, it was explained that all of the Councils in the partnership possessed teams that provided support and assistance to those accessing related services, including but not limited to financial, mental health or addiction support. There was no concept of 'lifetime bans' for users, each case was reviewed periodically, with efforts made to remove barriers preventing active and positive engagement. It was the prerogative of the Councils to challenge the Registered Providers when and if necessary. During the appeal process, Councils would support the prospective tenant.

It was acknowledged that demand for houses outweighed the number able to be supplied, this issue was not unique to the region, but nationwide.

It was confirmed that it remained Select Move's policy that a homeowner was not an appropriate applicant or user of the service unless their own property was unable to meet their required needs. It was clarified that although the Council's supported efforts to assist those that required specialised places, such as in the over 55 accommodation, it was the Registered Providers that gave resistance and was strict with adhering to their criteria.

The Social Prescribing Team at Chorley Council provided feedback to the Task Group related to their experience assisting residents with Select Move. They suggested that there was a hub or drop in site available for those that were digitally excluded, or had issues accessing the website. It was added that there was funding available to provide support and organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Help the Homeless that provide help and assistance. An additional issue was raised that some had issues logging in, remembering their user information, and some had difficulties due to having no access to a phone.

When asked by Members, it was agreed that the greatest issue impacting the users of Select Move, from the perspectives of the three Councils was the shortage of properties larger than two bedrooms, demand was unable to be met and it resulted in some users being disappointed and disempowered.

The Chair thanked Suzanne Ravenscroft, Councillor Nweeda Khan, and John Cameron for their attendance and contribution.

13 Discussion to Formulate Select Move Survey/Questionnaire

It had been arranged for a digital and telephone survey to be taken for the users of Select Move.

Members discussed the themes and topics to be asked which included

- The process of Select Move
- Use and ease of the website, from first contact to success.
- What available assistance was in place, and awareness of the support offered by Councilors.
- The average length of time a user had been on Select Move before successfully bidding on a property.

The Chair gave the Task Group Members an additional week to submit topics or themes to the Policy Team in charge of the survey.

14 Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 15 March 2022 at 6:30.

Chair

Date