

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Customer and Advice Services (Introduced by the Member for Customer and Advice Services)	Executive Cabinet	28 August 2014

RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP ON SELECT MOVE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To respond to the findings and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny inquiry report on Select move.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That the Executive Cabinet endorses the response included within the report to be received by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group for Select move was given the objective to look at the Select move Choice Based Lettings scheme and to investigate and evidence if the scheme is meeting customer needs and expectations. This included exploring the processes around application and allocations, and also the standard of the homes allocated.
4. A variety of methods was used and included engaging stakeholders, partners and also customers.
5. Overall, the Task Group found that the scheme was fit-for-purpose and that the evidence collected demonstrated that the scheme was meeting the needs of the customers.
6. There were some areas for improvements identified by the Task Group and therefore the Task Group proposed 15 recommendations, which it was felt would improve the present policies and procedures to better serve the residents of Chorley.

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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Key Decision? Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

7. To inform Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Executive's response to the recommendations made by the O&S Inquiry on Select Move.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

8. None

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

9. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all		A strong local economy	
Clean, safe and healthy communities		An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	X

BACKGROUND

10. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointed a Task Group in July 2013 following concern regarding the accessibility and user-friendliness of Select Move, in addition to the perception that people from outside the sub region and without local connection were accessing properties in Chorley.

KEY OBJECTIVES

11. The Task Group decided to investigate three desired outcomes, specifically:
 - a) To ascertain if Select Move is a choice based lettings service that meets the needs of Chorley residents.
 - b) To identify areas of improvement on condition of property at handover.
 - c) To reduce waiting times and lists.
12. The Task Group panel concluded that the Select Move system does largely meet the needs of Chorley Residents, as customer satisfaction is good, allocations are being made within a reasonable period and the majority of customer indicated they would not wish to return to the previous system of allocation.
13. The Executive Cabinet welcomes these findings as the Council entered the Select Move partnership and committed financial resources to a choice based lettings system in order to improve service to customers and expedite the process of applying for, and securing a new home, and Select Move has delivered this.
14. The Task Group found no major concerns regarding the condition of properties at handover, however they have made some recommendations to Registered Providers as to ways in which customer satisfaction could be further enhanced.
15. These recommendations will be of interest to our partners and the Council will encourage partners to recognise their value and implement the proposals (in Chorley). However, the Council cannot require Registered Providers to do this.
16. The Council is committed to ensuring that those in greatest housing need are able to access affordable housing and therefore has worked with partners to review the Allocations Policy, to ensure qualification and local connection provisions are robust. The Task Group acknowledge this important and relevant work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. The Report of the Task Group makes 15 recommendations and therefore the Council has considered these and provided a response to each, including consideration regarding deliverability and the resources necessary for implementation. The recommendations along with the requisite response in bold italics are listed below:

Recommendation one

18. That there continues to be regular monitoring by the Council of the level of net migration into Chorley, including periodic reporting to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to ensure the new policy achieves the overall aims of prioritising Chorley properties for those with a connection to the borough, and migration does not exceed 10%.

19. **The Council has closely monitored the level of net inward migration from the implementation of the Select Move scheme in 2011 and will continue to do this monthly, reporting to the Executive Member for Customer and Advice Services and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee bi-annually. The information available is dependent on the Registered Providers regularly updating the system following their lets. This analysis will include highlighting any specific geographical areas where inward migration is particularly high.**

Recommendation two

20. That each Registered Provider review their processes for handing over properties at relet stage, including both recording the time taken to prepare a property ready for a let and also the level of assistance for new tenants. That all Registered Providers look to raise their offer to the same standard across all providers

21. **The Council endorses this recommendation and we will strongly recommend that Registered Providers in Chorley work together to deliver this. However we are not able to require Registered Providers to do this and therefore it will rely on good will and their desire to improve the service for customers.**

Recommendation three

22. That each Registered Provider review the provision for a decoration allowance for new tenants and review its level, increasing it where necessary, to ensure it is sufficient.

23. **The Council endorses this recommendation and we will request that Registered Providers commit to this. However we are not able to require Registered Providers to do this and therefore it will rely on good will and desire to improve the service for customers, particularly as this is a discretionary benefit.**

Recommendation four

24. That the partnership consider the provision of surgeries or drop in sessions for customers to allow face to face support and demonstrations of how to perform certain tasks on the Select Move system.

25. **The Council recommends that the partnership work with the Council to provide surgeries or drop in sessions for customers. This work will require resourcing and therefore it is essential that it is shared across the partnership (in Chorley).**

Recommendation five

26. That any provision for surgeries or drop-in include the rural areas and are promoted to ensure that older people are aware of them and able to attend.
27. **The Council recommends that the Registered Providers in Chorley work with the Council to provide surgeries or drop in sessions for customers in rural areas where there is a demand for the service. This work will require resourcing and therefore it is essential that it is shared across the partnership.**

Recommendation six

28. That the partnership considers undertaking a process of proactive marketing to those who are not bidding regularly and offer to provide assistance. This should include promotion of any drop-in sessions, mailing out of the newsletter and assisting bidding on properties by proxy.
29. **The Council recognises that a large proportion of customers registered on Select Move do not bid regularly and that this could indicate a need for assistance for a minority of those customers. The Council therefore endorse this and will recommend to the partnership that some proactive marketing is undertaken in order to identify what proportion of those customers who are not bidding, are struggling to use or access the system.**
30. For those customers who are identified as experiencing some difficulties, either because of a lack of access to a computer or because they are unable to use the technology, steps will be put in place to assist them.

Recommendation seven

31. That the Registered Providers within the partnership are encouraged to provide more details in their property adverts, including detail of any specific local connection provisions (for example in rural villages) and also the provision of photographs on the majority of adverts
32. **The Council acknowledges that property adverts which lack information such as Photographs and local connection provisions do not promote informed choice for customers and this issue has been raised at the Select move partnership. The Council therefore will strongly encourage the Registered Providers within the partnership to provide more details in their adverts, with photographs to be supplied in the majority of adverts.**

Recommendation eight

33. That the partners continue to work collaboratively to develop a database of adapted properties which will ensure that when an adapted property becomes available, it can be advertised with all of the relevant information to ensure it is appropriately allocated.
34. **The Council has recognised the need for a coordinated approach to the allocation of adapted properties and therefore there is an established task group across Registered Providers and the Council exploring how this can be delivered. This task group will continue and the objective will be to deliver a fit for purpose database which can be shared across partners.**

Recommendation nine

35. That the Registered Providers within the partnership endeavour to include any properties which are to be direct matched, on the Select Move system, clearly specifying it is not available for other applicants, in order to enhance transparency and integrity in the scheme.
36. **It is important that the Select move system is transparent and includes information about all allocations or lets made in the Chorley area. The Council acknowledges that there may be occasions where a direct match is appropriate, it would be beneficial to understand the frequency and location of these allocations. Therefore the Council will strongly recommend that Registered Providers include all directly matched properties onto the system.**

Recommendation ten.

37. That the partnership lobbies Abris to implement the new system upgrade in order to improve the customer interface.
38. **The Council working with our partners have been liaising with Abris in order to secure the improvements to the system and as a result of this work, a system upgrade is anticipated to be delivered by the end of 2014. This will improve the customer interface as well as improving system processing.**

Recommendation eleven

39. That the partnership ensures that any affordability policies or tests are consistent across Registered Providers and that these policies do not wholly exclude groups of customers.
40. **The Registered Providers working within the Select Move partnership recognise that some customers on low incomes are no longer able to afford social housing and therefore have committed to developing a single policy to look at income levels and what income is necessary in order to manage a tenancy for different family sizes. The Council does not seek to promote the allocation of homes to those who are unable to afford them however, at the same time, we have a duty to ensure accommodation is allocated to those in greatest need.**
41. **The Council fully endorses the recommendation that if Registered Providers are committed to introducing affordability policies, that there is a single policy approach, otherwise it could become very confusing for customers. Therefore this will be recommended to Registered Providers.**

Recommendation twelve

42. That the partnership ensures that as part of any affordability policy, there are provisions available which will help customers to improve their circumstances in order to pass any assessment of affordability threshold in order to secure a property and that these are consistently available across all Registered Providers.
43. **The Council considers it essential that any affordability policy includes provisions for assisting customers who have been deemed to be unable to afford a social rented home, to improve their prospects through enabling training, employment or budgeting advice. Therefore the Council strongly recommends that any Registered Provider wishing to introduce the affordability policy provides measures and resources to helping prospective tenants to improve their circumstances.**

Recommendation thirteen

44. That the Council continues to work with Registered Providers in order to enable new affordable housing of the right type and tenure is available so local housing need is met.
45. **Chorley Council has an excellent track record of delivering affordable housing through a mix of using existing homes, empty properties and also newbuild on both section 106 sites and grant funded sites. Further the Council has invested a significant amount of its own resources, both capital and land assets, in order to enable new affordable housing. The Council therefore endorses this recommendation and will continue to maximise delivery by identifying opportunities and working with Registered Providers to deliver these. Part of this work is to look at new ways of delivering affordable housing, including the Gentoo product, which is a project the Council are leading on.**

Recommendation fourteen

46. That the partnership amends the banding notification letter to include confirmation as to the evidence on which the banding is based.
47. **There are standard letter templates within the Select move system and therefore the Council will work with the Operational Group to devise a template for a revised banding letter and implement this as soon as is practicable.**

Recommendation fifteen

48. That the partnership recognise the importance of treating social housing customers with dignity and respect and that customer service standards are met.
49. **Customer care is a priority for all the partners in the Select move partnership however it is not feasible for training to be delivered across all the staff who contribute to the delivery of Select move. It may be beneficial to develop a single statement of customer care standards or a customer charter as part of Select move and the Council will recommend this to the Select move partnership.**

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

50. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	✓	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	✓	Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

51. The majority of the recommendations relate to the RP's. Where the Council has a role to play in delivery, staff time will be allocated eg providing drop-in sessions to demonstrate how to use Select Move and designing any promotional material. There will be some costs incurred relating to marketing in the order of £1,000. This will be found from within existing resources and steps will be taken to requests registered providers to contribute to costs.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

52. No comments.

LESLEY-ANN FENTON
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER AND ADVICE SERVICES

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Zoe Whiteside	5771	17/7/14	

Background Papers			
Document	Date	File	Place of Inspection
Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group Select move	April 2014	Web	https://democracy.chorley.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Ild=34141