

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Customer and Advice Services	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	7 th April 2015

REPORT TO PROVIDE A MONITORING UPDATE FOLLOWING THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP INQUIRY INTO SELECT MOVE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report provides an update on progress made to implement the fifteen recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group which looked into Select Move. The final report of the task group was published in April 2014 and it was endorsed by Executive Cabinet in August 2014.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. To note the updates provided in section 12.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. This report provides the six monthly update on the outstanding actions from the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group inquiry into Select Move.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

4. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

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

BACKGROUND

5. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked the Task Group to undertake a scrutiny inquiry to look at the Select Move Choice Based Lettings scheme, of which the Council is a member, alongside 9 Registered Providers of social housing (hereafter referred to as RPs). The Select Move scheme is the method by which social housing in Chorley (in addition to Preston and South Ribble) is allocated.
6. Objectives were agreed to investigate and evidence whether Select Move is meeting the needs to the satisfaction of the applicants, by reviewing a) the application processes b) the allocation processes and c) the standard of allocated properties.

7. Desired Outcomes of the review included to secure a choice-based lettings service that meets the needs of Chorley residents, and to identify areas of improvement on condition of property at handover, and finally, to reduce waiting times and lists.
8. The task group concluded that Select Move does largely meet our customers' needs, as satisfaction is good and allocations are being made within a period we considered to be reasonable. The majority of customers when asked if the Council should revert back to the old system said that we should not. Choice and personal preference are key elements of the scheme and so these were found to have a bearing on how long a customer may wait until they secure a property (for example, some customers prefer to wait for a particular street or area until they place a bid on a property).
9. A quick review of waiting times in days on Select Move before being housed during the period of 12/09/2012 to 11/09/2013 was on average 286 days to receive the offer of housing, and 323 days to be housed, with 552 lets in Chorley. Compared to the 12 months 01/01/2014 to 31/12/2014, the average to receive an offer was 242 days (reduced by 15.4%) and the average number of days taken to be housed was 294 (down 9.0%). This may have been at least in part due to the increased number of lets being 635, an increase of 83 or 15.0% from the first comparable year.
10. The number of **Chorley households on the Housing Register** has fallen over the last two years:

31/12/2012: 1,483
31/12/2013: 1,351
31/12/2014: 965
11. Whilst the fall in number above are mainly due to changes in the Allocations Policy, the increased **number of lets in the Chorley** will also have helped, with the lets per calendar year demonstrated below

2012: 514
2013: 617
2014: 635
12. The task group did identify that there are some areas of Select Move we need to improve. However with the then forthcoming refreshed Allocations Policy (which was subsequently implemented) and the software system upgrade, (which is scheduled for implementation in May 2015) there have been and will be, ongoing improvements for the customer interface and experience. The task group identified a total of fifteen recommendations which would contribute to the achievement of the identified objectives and desired outcomes.
13. The implementation of the majority of the recommendations require the willingness and cooperation of our partners, particularly Registered Providers of Social Housing (RPs) as the Council no longer has any housing. The Council retains a statutory duty to ensure social housing is allocated according to housing need and therefore plays an important enabling role in working with RPs. Therefore RPs were engaged in discussions regarding the relevant recommendations to ensure the outcomes were meaningful and deliverable.
14. Below is the list of fifteen recommendations and the corresponding update on progress made to date.

Overview & Recommendation	Scrutiny	Executive Response	Update
That there continues to be regular		Agreed	Inward migration is monitored in the Housing

<p>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%.</p>		<p>Team on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Analysis of the period from August 2013 to December 2014 has demonstrated a reduction inward migration from 8.66% to 0.47%. See Appendix 1</p> <p>The drop from 8.66% to 0.47% is directly connected to the refreshed Select Move Allocations policy which came into effect in February 2014. The new policy disqualified households from the Housing Register if they had no local connection to Chorley, Preston or South Ribble, and also gives priority within each band to households with a verified local connection to the borough the property is located in.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>Collectively, the RPs reviewed their processes and agree that there is consistency, as each partner incurs similar costs for the average property relet (this is reported to be IRO £2,200 per property). All RPs undertake void inspections, some involving either tenant representative inspectors and /or random Chief Executive officer checks, to ensure the quality is high and consistent.</p> <p>RPs are committed to letting properties and eliminating voids and so each has provisions for flexibility when it comes to facilitating a let. This flexibility can vary from new kitchen units, additional decoration or even carpets. There are also provisions for help with moving.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>All RPs in Chorley offer a decoration allowance at a similar amount per room for new tenants and all have the flexibility to vary this offer dependant on the condition of the property they are moving into and also their vulnerability. RPs feel that unless a tenant is vulnerable (in which case decoration may be undertaken on their behalf) decoration is a personal choice and should be undertaken by the tenant</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>Each RP has in place a service offer for customers around digital inclusion. These included specialist officers who work on an outreach basis, providing customers with practical help to learn how to use their own technology and or help to access online systems where a</p>

<p>certain tasks on the Select Move system.</p>		<p>customer is unsure what they need to do.</p> <p>Some RPs have tenants who act as digital champions, who will engage with other tenants and prospective tenants to provide help, which works very well and is popular as this is more a peer based approach.</p> <p>The Council's existing customer services will also offer assistance to customers in using Select Move in the one stop shop and where vulnerable customers have requested printed copies of the weekly Select Move newsletter they are sent out by the Council and the RPs. From 2015 -2017 the Council is developing and implementing a digital inclusion project with the aim of increasing Chorley resident's access to on-line services which will look to include accessing Select Move.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>As above, RPs do not feel there is a need or sufficient demand for surgeries as their experience has proved these arrangements to be poorly attended. Each RP has something in place already to offer customers who live in a rural location, help with accessing the Select Move system. This offer is targeted at older and vulnerable people, RPs agree that customers of working age who are fit and well should be able to access local IT facilities and this links into the Council digital inclusion project.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>RPs each have provision for assisting those who are unable to bid and some of the RPs regularly review their customers applications and bidding activity to identify those who appear to be having difficulties. The RPS agree that the reasons for non-bidding are complex and in many cases are linked to personal choice, timing and other personal circumstances. Mailing out newsletters and proxy bidding are some of the measures made available to assist customers. RPs did not feel that there would be any merit in doing anything over and above what is currently in place to help customers.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>As above, each RP have measures in place to</p>

		provide assistance to those who need it
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	Agreed	All RPs agree that details on property adverts including photographs are important and therefore renewed their commitment to ensuring these are included on adverts for Chorley properties.
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.	Agreed	This piece of work has been started across the partners in Chorley however there are identified barriers to the project being delivered including the quality of data available regarding adapted properties, the format of the available data and then the resourcing of maintaining this data, to ensure it is kept up-to-date. RPs agree that there is still a compelling case to explore this and therefore it will be taken forward as an action for the partners including the Council, to deliver.
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	Agreed	Direct matches are recorded on the system and the figures reported on the quarterly monitoring report which is presented to the Select Move Steering Group on a quarterly basis. The reports demonstrate that RPs are recording these.
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.	Agreed	<p>One of the RPs in Chorley does not use any affordability policy or criteria to allocate housing. The other RPS do have policies which look at income and expenditure and the customers' ability to afford to run a home. Each of the RPs with these policies offers assistance to customers with income maximisation and financial inclusion in order to address fundamental issues and improve customer's prospects of being allocated a property.</p> <p>The RPs advise that some of the issues with the ability for certain groups to afford a property are linked to welfare reform measures and national policy. There are some initiatives in Chorley specifically aimed at those group particularly affected including those aged under 25 years of age and those aged between 25 years of age and</p>

		35 years of age
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.	Agreed	Each of the RPs with these policies offers assistance to customers with income maximisation and financial inclusion in order to address fundamental issues and improve customer's prospects of being allocated a property.
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.	Agreed	The Council has an excellent working relationship with the two main developing RPs in Chorley and have delivered a good supply of affordable housing in recent years, with 129 units in 2013/14 and exceeding local targets. The forward plan for pipeline delivery suggests this delivery will continue and is flexed in order to meet local need, with variance in mix and type applied as new schemes are negotiated.
That the partnership amends the banding notification letter to include confirmation as to the evidence on which the banding is based.	Agreed	The RPs confirmed that these letters do state the relevant information used to make a banding decision and therefore no action is required.
That the partnership recognises the importance of treating social housing customers with dignity and respect and that customer service standards are met.	Agreed	Each RP has internal mechanisms for collecting information regarding customer satisfaction and report that there is overall high satisfaction from their customers. A relevant point is that occasionally negative decisions regarding allocations need to be made and therefore 100% customer satisfaction may not always be achievable. However it was agreed between the RPs that existing customer care policies and standards of each respective partner is sufficient to ensure a consistent standard of service is delivered.

15. In conclusion, the scrutiny review of Select Move has demonstrated that the system is effective and meets customer's needs. The most significant issue concerning Select Move, namely that of inward migration has been addressed through the implementation of a policy revision. The monitoring data illustrates the impact these measures have had on ensure customers with a local connection to the borough have the greatest chance of securing homes in Chorley. This monitoring work has become business as usual for the Housing Team and will be ongoing.

16. A further outcome of this piece of work is a demonstrate of the partnership approach we have with the RPs in Chorley, who were all involved in both the scrutiny work itself and also implementing the recommendations. The policy refresh and system upgrade confirm that all partners remain committed to Select Move and its ongoing improvement to the benefit of the customer.

LESLEY-ANN FENTON
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER AND ADVICE SERVICES

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Zoe Whiteside	5771	19.3.15	

Appendix

Graphs to Illustrate Migration Fluctuations

Figure 1

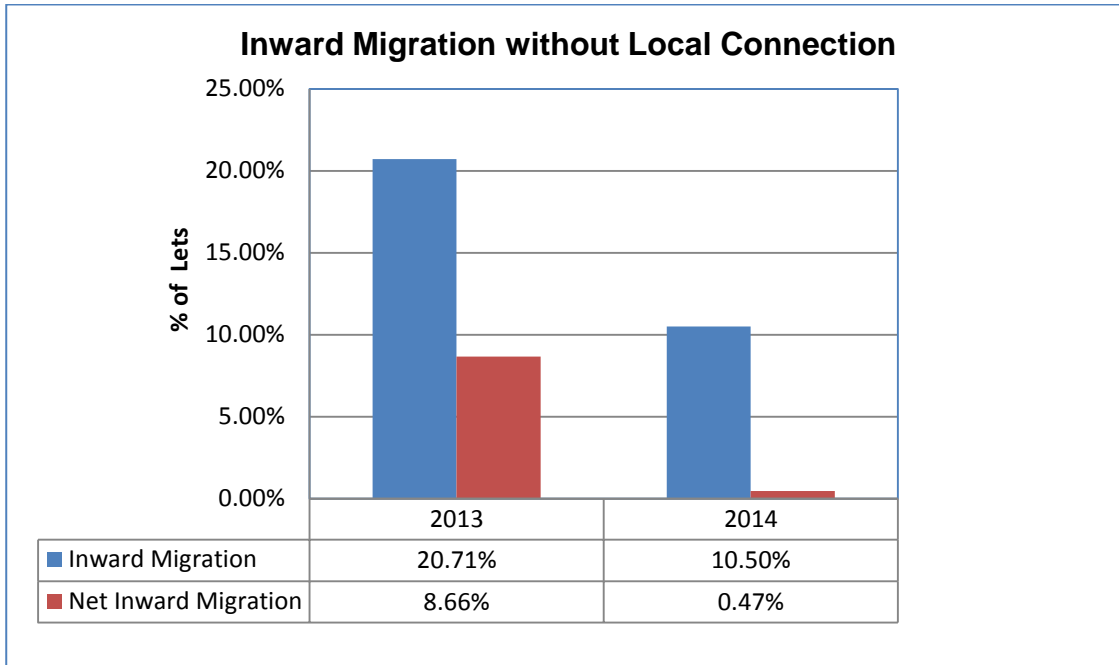


Figure 2

