

Report of	Meeting	Date
Select Move	Committee Task Group	2 nd December 2021

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Yes
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Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards
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Purpose of the Report

1. This report has been produced to update members on the operation of the Select Move Partnership, specifically the updates on recommendations from previous Overview and Scrutiny Task Group in 2014.

Recommendations to Scrutiny Committee

2. To consider the information in this report and decide on any further action required.

Reasons for recommendations

3. As requested at Overview and Scrutiny Committee a full report is required to address issues with the administration of Select Move social housing register.

Other options considered and rejected

4. No other options considered necessary.

Executive summary

5. This report gives an overview of the Select Move Partnership, the current opportunities and challenges of this system. Previous scrutiny aimed to ensure that Select Move as a service is meeting the needs of Chorley Residents with a focus on;
 - The application process
 - The allocations process
 - The standard of properties when let
6. Recommendations were made in 2014 as a result of this review which we seek to provide updates on.
7. It is important to note that although as the council we steer the partnership, any recommendations past/future can be raised with the Select Move partnership and any proposed changes can be explained and put to a vote. However, as a partner we have no ability to enforce desired changes outside of the current memorandum of understanding.

Corporate priorities

8. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Background to the report

9. Select Move is the administration of social housing for Chorley in line with statutory duties in The Housing Act 1996 (part VI) in relation to the allocation of social housing. The intent is to pool resources in terms of processing applications and letting of properties in a fair and transparent way, in line with a common allocations policy which awards priority to applicants based on their circumstances.
10. It should promote choice for our customers while delivering safe and suitable housing for residents. Our landlord partners are charged with providing decent homes to our joint customers and to help us achieve our aim of thriving neighbourhoods and communities.
11. Issues have been raised with the delivery of the choice-based lettings system by members and by customers in terms of the quota of social housing properties advertised via Select Move, the ICT platform used to administer the system, the information given about vacant properties and accessing advice or support from the Housing Solutions team.

12. An update was provided on 30th September 2021 in relation to the Partnership. In brief these updates included;

- An upgrade of the Civica web based system for applicants, landlord partners and the local authorities; to advertise and let the properties as agreed in line with the common allocations policy. The upgrade should provide an easier to use online tool for customers, making it easier to view and bid for advertised properties. Customers will be able to access Select Move system on mobile devices such as a phone and tablet. The upgrade was also required in terms of the functionality and compatibility with the web browsers used corporately. We also expect to be able to retrieve more detailed local data with the upgraded reporting functions in the system, which will help us to answer some of the outstanding queries and have oversight of the operations of Select Move.
- The agreement to appoint a Select Move Co-Ordinator to chair the Select Move steering group, work alongside the local authorities and RP partners, ensure adherence to the agreed policy and address issues raised for the benefit of all. This gives us a single point of contact for the issues raised and alongside the upgrade gives us the capacity to report in more detail and ensure adherence to the agreements of the partnership. This will be jointly funded by Chorley Council, Preston City Council and South Ribble Borough Council. It is a post that will sit in Chorley's Housing Solutions team and is due to go to advert imminently.
- The appointment of a new Housing Solutions Manager in Chorley to address the resourcing and operational issues within the team, ensuring customers can access the advice and support required as soon as possible, improving the service and access to the staff team despite the ongoing pressures as a result of current vacancies and staff sickness. The manager now in post is focussed on resolving the resource issue as swiftly as possible with agency staffing, ongoing recruitment and assistance from colleagues within/outside the council to improve access and the service offer to Chorley customers.

Update on the recommendations previously made by the Committee

13. The table below shows the recommendations of the 2014 Scrutiny report, an update in relation to these and any further action required where relevant

Recommendation	Update	Further actions
That each RP 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 RPs look raise their offer to the same standard across all providers.	Landlords will have an internal monitor for their average time to let void properties and are targeted on turning around as quickly as possible but they must also do so in line with their own void standard. Repairs and relets have been impacted by the pandemic (staffing, covid restrictions and availability of materials). There does not seem to	Updates to be requested at operational/steering group level regarding both void lengths and last void standard review date.

	<p>have been an appetite for RP's to standardise their offer of assistance to new tenants largely due to many of the registered providers having stock levels over a wider area and their new tenant offer being part of the national offer from their organisation</p>	<p>For discussion at operational/steering group and also for strategic review of commissioned support where assisted into accommodation by Housing Solutions</p>
<p>That each RP review the provision for a decoration allowance for new tenants and review its level, increasing it to ensure it where necessary to ensure it is sufficient.</p>	<p>It's unknown a review was conducted into this via the Select Move Steering group. Anecdotal information is that landlords provide these vouchers ad hoc dependent on the property and the economic circumstances of the tenant</p>	<p>To be discussed with partners at operational/steering groups as soon as possible.</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 certain tasks on the Select Move system.</p>	<p>This recommendation was implemented and a digital inclusion officer was appointed within the housing team at CBC to conduct drop in sessions throughout the borough so customers could be supported with completing Select Move applications online.</p> <p>From the initial sessions, it became evident that there was a need for digital support on a wider scale (such as support with completing online housing benefit and council tax support claims) – following this, the digital inclusion role was moved from housing into the customer services team.</p> <p>Subsequently, Lancashire West CAB were commissioned to do general digital inclusion sessions throughout the borough which included support with Select Move. These sessions were still being delivered daily, at different locations within the borough,</p>	<p>Review of current offer in line with recovery from pandemic operations required Communities team are looking to do some digital support with customers moving forward (potentially through the voluntary sector) and Housing Solutions will collaborate on this so Select Move support is included.</p>

	up until the start of the pandemic	
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.	The initial housing digital inclusion sessions took place borough-wide and included the outlying villages such as Croston, Eccleston, Mawdesley, Withnell and Brinscall as well as less rural locations.	As above for review following pandemic restrictions
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>This has been discussed at steering group previously but none of the partners have capacity to do this for all active applications, across the board.</p> <p>The RP's proactively contact their own transfer tenants and the LA's and RP's contact anyone in a priority band who hasn't placed a bid in the last 6 months.</p> <p>A renewals procedure has also been implemented (where a paper renewal form is sent out to each customer annually and needs signing and returning to advise that there has been no change of circumstances and the applicant wishes to remain on the register) and this results in many inactive accounts being closed down.</p> <p>The 6 month bidding reviews that all the partners conduct on their priority bands (A, B and C) also picks up any applicants who need additional support however, applicants who are active in bands D and E and not bidding regularly are not currently offered any additional support.</p>	
That the RPs within the	Select Move has been	Ongoing discussions can be

<p>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.</p>	<p>updated to allow more information to be provided on property adverts (such as energy ratings) and there is also function for the RP's to upload photographs of properties however, most RP's either just use stock photographs or choose not to upload photographs for a variety of reasons.</p> <p>One is that many of the properties which go through Select Move are tenanted when the advert goes live (they tend to go out to advert as soon as the landlord receives notice from the tenant or serves notice on their tenant) so there is only a short turn-around time and it's not thought to be practical to get permission from existing tenants and arrange for photographs to be taken prior to putting the advert on.</p> <p>Additionally, good quality property photographs would take up a large volume of storage on the Civica system which would incur additional costs. RP's feel that photographs are of limited use and that a viewing of the property prior to sign up works better There could also be issues in relation to safeguarding and the potential for interested applicants to make contact with sitting tenants if a property can be distinguished by a photograph and these issues must be considered.</p>	<p>had with RPs about having more photos where appropriate.</p>
<p>That the partners continue to work collaboratively to develop a database of adapted properties which will ensure that when an</p>	<p>Historically, there have been issues with records of adapted properties being passed on when a new provider takes on the</p>	<p>We will pick this query up with RP partners to ask for this information if they have it or can easily retrieve it</p>

<p>adapted property becomes available, it can be advertised with all of the relevant information to ensure it is appropriately allocated.</p>	<p>housing stock from another provider so we have seen adapted properties advertised as general needs through the system however, this is happening less as existing providers conduct thorough surveys of their stock (for instance Jigsaw who took over from Adactus, CBC's stock-transfer housing association, are currently undertaking a borough-wide property survey which will pick up any adapted properties that have been missed).</p> <p>Additionally, there is scope within the system for anyone in an existing adapted property to be awarded band A on Select Move if they do not need adaptations which has encouraged more people to come forward and highlight that their property has adaptations.</p>	
<p>That the RPs 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.</p>	<p>There is function through the system for RP's to direct match an applicant to a property and all partners have access to this information however, as all partners have agreed to advertise at least 75% of their stock through Select Move (this is reviewed to ensure compliance), meaning landlords still have scope to direct match outside of Select Move.</p>	<p>Further discussion required at operational/steering groups to ask landlords about use of this function and address any reluctance to do so</p>
<p>That the partnership lobbies Abris (now Civica) to implement the new system upgrade in order to improve the customer interface.</p>	<p>Abris (now Civica) have provided previous costings for an upgrade to the system but the partnership voted that it was not cost effective to go ahead at that time. However, due to the necessity of an upgrade to maintain functionality from</p>	

	<p>summer 2022; the partnership have now voted to go ahead with a system upgrade which is schedule to be completed early next year which will improve functionality and ease of use for customers,</p>	
<p>That there continues to be regular monitoring by the Council of the level of net migration into Chorley, to ensure the new policy achieves the overall aims of prioritising Chorley properties for those with a connection to the borough</p>	<p>There is a reporting function in the system that should pull this information, though it does not appear to have been done by the local authority previously.</p>	<p>Report to be produced as soon as possible. This can then be scheduled on a regular basis and will likely also sit with the SM co-ordinator.</p>
<p>That the partnership ensures that any affordability policies or tests are consistent across RPs and that these policies do not wholly exclude groups of customers.</p>	<p>Select Move has a standard income and expenditure form that all applicants complete and initial affordability checks are conducted based on this.</p> <p>Due to differences in rental costs from provider to provider and dependent on whether the property is social rent or affordable rent, the RP's conduct their own affordability checks in line with their own policies at the point of offer. The allocations policy itself excludes individuals/couples who earn above £60k annually.</p>	<p>Affordability assessments and applied policies of all landlord partners to be reviewed by incoming Select Move Co-Ordinator</p>
<p>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 RPs.</p>	<p>All partners are equipped to offer support (usually in the form of signposting) to customers with affordability issues due to things such as debt, unemployment and benefit problems but this is not consistent across the partnership as this type of support differs across the three Select Move areas and from registered provider to registered provider. Some RP's have dedicated</p>	<p>Review of provision/audit across the partnership required, again the SM Co-Ordinator can pick this up</p>

	<p>officers to provide support with employment and training and budgeting skills whilst others signpost into local VFS organisations providing this advice and support.</p>	
<p>That the Council continues to work with RPs in order to enable new affordable housing of the right type and tenure is available so local housing need is met.</p>	<p>Through section 106 agreements and the relationship that the spatial planning team have with developers and registered providers, the council aims to ensure that enough new affordable housing is built in the area.</p> <p>From the Select Move partnership point of view, new registered providers are coming onboard (this has increased recently) and there is a current costings review to make it more attractive to smaller partners to join the partnership (with the proposal of a sliding scale based on stock numbers rather than a flat fee)</p>	

Equality and diversity

- 14. Equality and Diversity is addressed by the Common Allocations Policy for the Select Move partnership.

Risk

The risk to the authority is in any lack of delivering against statutory duties to administer social housing as well as failing to work in partnership with our registered provider partners, making best use of the limited social housing available in the borough.

Background documents

- 15. 2014 Scrutiny Report including recommendations.
- 16. Select Move Allocations Policy.

17. Appendices

18. Appendix A
2014 Scrutiny Report
19. Appendix B etc.
Select Move Allocations Policy