

## **Housing Registrations Scrutiny Review – Draft Final Report**

### **Summary**

1. This report presents the findings and recommendations from the Housing Allocations Scrutiny Review and asks Members to endorse the recommendations so that they may be fed into the ongoing Allocations Service Development officer review. This final report will subsequently be included as an annex to the officer review report due to be presented to the Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods in August 2016.

### **Background to Review**

2. In March 2016 the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee received an overview of the council's Housing Allocations & Choice Based Lettings system. This provided an update on the ongoing officer review of the Council's current working methods, and the legislation and North Yorkshire Homes Choice (NYHC) allocations policy that governs those processes.
3. The Committee agreed they would like to participate in the ongoing review and a Task Group was formed. In early May 2016 the Task Group met for the first time to receive introductory information in support of their review and agreed the following review aim and objectives:

'To actively engage with and contribute to the ongoing officer review, to help shape improvements to the Council's housing allocations process and contribute to the decisions and actions to be taken around the Council's Housing Allocation & Choice Based Lettings System.'

#### **Objectives:**

- i. To review the Housing Registrations service to understand the Council's policy, process, systems and application criteria.

- ii. To consider national good practice, visits and findings of the 'Allocations Service Development Officer Review' work to date.
- iii. To consider proposed changes to the Housing Registrations service, systems and policy and the implications associated with any changes.

## **Consultation**

4. This scrutiny review has been supported by the Head of Housing Services, the Housing Registrations Manager and the Service Manager for Housing Options & Homelessness. Housing Services Staff and customers have also been consulted as part of the ongoing officer review – see paragraph 21 below.

## **Information Gathered**

*Objective (i) - To review the Housing Registrations service to understand the Council's policy, process, systems and application criteria*

### 5. Housing & the Law

The Homeless Legislation Housing Act 1996 (Part 7) details the Council's duty to:

- Provide housing advice to all those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
  - Accommodate those who have mental capacity to apply, who are eligible (immigration law), homeless within 28 days and **believed** to be in priority need (with children, pregnant or vulnerable, fleeing violence or other emergency – flood, fire). The duty at this point is to investigate and if homeless immediately to provide temporary accommodation (Ordnance Lane, Crombie House, Holgate Road, Howe Hill family block, B&B).
  - Offer permanent accommodation if the applicant is eligible, homeless, in priority need, unintentional and has a local connection to York (exceptions are fleeing domestic violence, or no connection to anywhere). Homeless applicants are then re-housed under the North Yorkshire Home Choice policy.
6. A Local Authority is required under the Housing Act (1996) and Homelessness Act (2002) and Localism Act (2011) to have an allocations and / or lettings policy which sets out the criteria to allocate social housing. This Council's policy (NYHC) was designed to ensure

that those in greatest need are housed, while at the same time balancing the need for sustainable communities.

7. There are a number of categories, to whom a Local Authority must give 'reasonable preference' (above other applicants) namely:
8. Reasonable Preference:
  - People who are homeless within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act
  - People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
  - People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability
  - People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).
  - People who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2) 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under.192(3)
9. Additional Preference:
  - Armed Forces who have urgent housing needs. Additional preference is deemed to be that the priority band date will be backdated by 6 months.
  - Applications from foster carers, those approved to adopt, or those persons being assessed for approval to foster or adopt, who need to move to a larger home in order to accommodate a looked after child or a child who was previously looked after by a local authority.
10. In addition, a policy must have regard to the codes of guidance issued to local housing authorities in England, in exercising the functions under 167(1A) and 167(2) of the Housing Act 1996 and be compatible with obligations imposed by other existing legislation, in addition to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 including:
  - The Human Rights Act 1998
  - The Freedom of Information Act 2000
  - Children Act 1989
  - Data Protection Act 1998
  - Crime & Disorder Act 1998
  - Homelessness Act 2002
  - The Equality Act 2010

11. It should also take into consideration the following guidance:

- Equality and Human Rights Commission (Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing – September 2006)
- Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local authorities in England 2012

12. City of York Council's Current Housing Policy

Until 2011, the York had a Housing Registrations and Lettings Policy which dealt only with properties owned by City of York Council (Housing). Any Housing Association Properties were allocated via a nomination system, whereby those in greatest need on CYC 'waiting list' would be nominated to the Housing Association who would assess them in accordance with their own policy (often different from CYC). The overall principle of housing people in greatest need was still prevalent. Properties were let to the applicant in the highest band for whom the property was suitable and who had been waiting the longest unless they were bypassed for a specific reason. Band A ("Very Urgent") was the highest band and Band E ("No Priority") was the lowest band. If this applicant refused the property then it would be offered to the next person on the list for whom the property was suitable unless the next person was bypassed for a specific reason. Properties were not advertised publically.

13. In 2011 in line with Government policy, Local Authorities were encouraged and supported financially to develop 'Choice Based Lettings' policies / systems, whereby vacant properties were advertised (via web based system) and individuals 'bid' on the properties they wanted to live in. This led to the introduction of a North Yorkshire Home Choice Policy (NYHC) & Choice Based Lettings system. NYHC is a sub regional partnership<sup>1</sup> which enables movement between Local Authorities across North Yorkshire (apart from Harrogate).

14. City of York Council hosts the scheme and employs (joint funding) the NYHC Coordinator (0.6 FTE). NYHC operates a Board and an operations group. This partnership utilises the same IT system (Abritas), operates the same lettings and allocation policy (with exceptions for charitable status) and enables registered applicants to move freely

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<sup>1</sup> Made up of City of York council, Selby DC, Scarborough BC, Hambleton DC, Ryedale DC, Craven DC, Richmondshire DC, Broadacres Housing Association, Yorkshire Housing Group and Yorkshire Coast Homes

across the partnership area (some restrictions of cross boundary movement for some applicants e.g. statutory homeless).

15. At its first meeting the Task Group also received information on the Council's comprehensive resettlement service for single homeless, whereby individuals are offered accommodation and support in 24 hour supported resettlement hostels (Arc Light, YACRO, Peasholme Centre, and Howe Hill for Young People). Once they have the relevant skills they will move onto less intensively supported shared housing and ultimate an independent tenancy. Independent accommodation may be in the private rented sector or via North Yorkshire Home Choice policy.
16. Officers went on to highlight the benefits and issues giving cause for concern associated with the NYHC sub regional choice based letting system:

#### Benefits:

- Cross Boundary movement – this does mean those typically in Bronze Band (no housing need) who would never be housed in York do get housed in other areas of the partnership where demand for properties is lower.
- Customers get to see details of properties up front, they get basic information and in most cases a photo of the property or similar in the area.
- Letting of properties across North Yorkshire is accessed by one application and follows the same common allocations policy making this a more straight forward process for customers when registering.
- Applicants can see each week what properties are/are not available.
- The process gives applicants perceived choice.
- Applicants are in control of the properties they show an interest in.
- Resettlement category has proved to be a successful pathway to housing for customers who otherwise may have been excluded from social housing.
- Potentially Homeless Applicants (those who are proven to be homeless within 90 days) have more properties to choose from as they can move across the NYHC area, preventing them becoming accepted homeless, reducing stress to applicants and their families and cost to CYC.
- The review process gives customers an independent view on decisions made under the NYHC policy.

#### Issues/Concerns

- NYHC is process driven, staff process rather than transact which can lead to missing some customer issues and turning all contact into an application for housing.
  - Applicants see properties they want going to those in the highest Band – Gold so are looking for ways to achieve Gold Banding
  - Whilst the aim has always been consistency with common goals, aims and a common allocations policy, there are differences across the partnership in how the policy is interpreted and implemented which has caused consistent issues for customers and staff.
  - Due to the different demographics of the partners there are different aims and objectives, meaning the NYHC policy and application has tried to be all encompassing.
  - For applicants in York perceived choice is not real choice due to a lack of property availability. Expectations are not being managed efficiently or effectively.
  - A lot of time spent registering applicants who will never be re housed in York, however under the current NYHC policy they have a right to be registered.
17. Finally, in order to fully debate any proposed future changes to both the front-facing service and the allocation of properties the Task Group were provided with an overview of the demands currently being placed on council housing and the current policy – see Annex A.

*Objective (ii) - To consider national good practice, visits and findings of the officer review work to date*

18. In early June 2016 the Task Group met again. In consideration of national best practice, the Task Group received a 'Report on Diseconomies' produced by Locality<sup>2</sup> which suggested a response to the challenges facing public services in a time of austerity cuts, mounting demand and rising expectations.
19. Having considered current national practice, the report highlighted that far too many public service systems 'assess rather than understand; transact rather than build relationships; refer on rather than take responsibility; prescribe packages of activity rather than take the time to understand what improves a life'. The result is that the problems people face are not resolved, that public services generate ever more 'failure

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<sup>2</sup> Locality is the leading nationwide network of community enterprises, development trusts, settlements and social action centres – for further information see [www.locality.org.uk](http://www.locality.org.uk)

demand', that resources are diverted to unproductive ends, and that costs are driven ever upwards – see report at Annex B.

20. The Task Group also received information on the ongoing Allocations Service Development Officer Review which had focussed on NYHC systems and processes rather than the workings of the sub-regional partnership and allocations policy, and employed a 'check, plan, do' methodology taking a systems thinking approach involving front line staff and service managers administering NYHC on a daily basis.
21. Officers provided a detailed presentation and report on Phase I of the Allocations Service Development Officer Review which focussed on 'Checking' and included gathering customer and staff insight, information on system inputs and outputs, and the type and frequency of customer demand - see the Phase I final report at Annex C.

*Objective (iii) - Proposed changes to the Housing Registrations service, systems and policy & the associated Implications*

22. Finally, the Task Group met again in mid June 2016 to consider officer proposals for Phase II ('Plan') of the Allocations Service Development Officer Review, which included the drafting of new operating principles, proposals for a fundamental system re-design, and feedback on staff and customer consultation – see Annex D.

## **Analysis**

### 23. Proposed changes to housing registrations system and policy

As a result of the officer review a number of blockages, systems waste, potential improvements were identified, which highlighted that there were a number of important points to be questioned, including:

- Delivery of the housing register. Should City of York council (CYC) remain in the sub regional partnership (North Yorkshire Home Choice) or form a mini partnership with other local authorities and local housing associations (Selby and / or Ryedale) or operate a stand alone – CYC system?
- Is a new IT system required?
- Should properties be offered via a 'Choice Based Lettings' system or via an allocation process by officers that is transparent for applicants?
- Should there be a physical (on-line and/or paper) waiting list application form or should there be an online system to log interest and then staff offer personal interviews asking relevant questions

only. An IT system / 'waiting list' would still exist but as a back office function which customers could view?

- The allocations policy needs minor amendments to meet current needs and legal requirements but a more significant decision about denying those with no housing need from the register also needs to be considered?



## Options

Decision	1	1	1	2	2		3	3	4	4	5
OPTIONS	Remain with NYHC	Leave NYHC and operate only as CYC	Leave NYHC but form a mini partnership (e.g. with Selby & Ryedale)	Retain Abrisas IT system	Change IT system	Self assessment tool	Remain choice based lettings	Allocation	Retain online waiting list application system	Adopt personal interview approach (no physical application form)	Amend policy
Option 1	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Option 2	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Option 3	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Option 4	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Option 5		✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Option 6		✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Option 7			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Option 8			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Option 9			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Option 10			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓

## Proposals for Change to Housing Registrations System & Policy

23. The table above details a number of options:
- Option 1 - 4 would remain in NYHC
  - Option 5 - 6 CYC would stand alone.
  - Option 7 - 10 would require the formation of a mini partnership with other Local Authorities and housing associations with a local presence (this has not been explored with neighbouring authorities).
24. **Decision 1-** Delivery of the register. Should CYC remain in the sub regional partnership (North Yorkshire Homechoice) or form a mini partnership with other local authorities (? Selby and / or Ryedale) or operate a stand alone – CYC system?
25. Advantages: wide choice of accommodation types and locations for customers. Opportunity for those in less need to bid on ‘hard to let’ properties out of area which enables applicants to access social housing (Data for the calendar year 2015 shows York exported 98 applicants and imported 57, leaving a net export of 41. York currently allocates around 6% (between 33 and 42) of its available properties each year to Bronze Band applicants (though a proportion of these will be imports). The only district York imported more households from than it exported to during 2015 was Ryedale (23 out/31 in). Sixteen of the 98 households leaving York during 2015 were in Bronze Band, 52 within Silver and the remaining 30 in Gold Band. Analysis of property type suggests Bronze Band applicants from York are likely to be moving to ‘harder to let’ properties in other districts. Moving from a sub-regional approach is unlikely to impact greatly on York’s ability to prevent homelessness , only 19 of the 98 exported applicants were potentially homeless (19%) . The impact on partners would also be minimal only 4 of the 57 imported applicants being potentially homeless (7%)
26. Disadvantages: Necessary to compromise on some points in a sub regional allocation policy in order to reach agreement across entire partnership, it is difficult / time consuming to change policy (it has to be agreed by all 10 partner boards / executive members), difficult to maintain consistency across the partnership regarding assessment and verification of applications, imported applicants are predominantly older people moving for care and support which puts some additional pressure on Adult Social Care, York as host agency acts as a referral point / training provider even when the Co-ordinator is not at work. Given that CYC hosts the coordinator post and chairs the board, if CYC withdrew it

would impact on the partnership and may put entire scheme into jeopardy. The reaction to the council leaving the scheme may strain relations with other partners at a time when there are negotiations over devolution.

27. **Decision 2** - Is a new IT system required?

28. Advantages to retaining the current system

Abritas delivers a sub regional IT system, accessed by all partners. An applicant can register in e.g. Scarborough and can be viewed by York if appropriate. The total cost pa to CYC of £12782 with any updates or changes to the system being chargeable in addition to this costs. The costs of changes can be considerable e.g. a standard small works order (1/2 day to a full days work) starts at £830 minimum (shared jointly amongst Local Authorities). Proposed changes to policy based on previous changes in 2013 would incur costs of circa £18000 (again shared jointly across the partner local authorities)

29. Disadvantages

The current process combined with the way the IT system is configured generates significant failure demand, 53% of customer contact failure demand has been identified as being due to the IT system, for example:

- Customers making contact for their application account being reset as they can not do it themselves,
- Customers requesting an update on their application as they have applied on line and when they log back into the system there is no visible update about what is happening with their application.
- Customers sending messages via the IT systems, with an average of 30+ messages a week being received directly onto the system, which all require investigation and follow up, again these are predominantly customers who have forgotten their login and can not re set it themselves, or who are having difficulty using the IT system or requesting an update on their application as the system gives them no visible update when they login.
- On line access for customers, does in nature invite applications from all, there is no way of filtering those in need and those not,
- the IT system does not give up front advice about the realistic chance of being housed into social housing in York.
- The IT system is not configured to talk to other CYC systems – Northgate (Housing and Benefits system) which deals with Council

tax, housing benefit claims, housing management – rent accounts and homeless statistics. In addition, it does not talk to Flare (Housing Standards and Adaptations system) or Servitor (Building maintenance system). All this means there is duplication of inputting. When a customer is working with the Housing Options system they currently use the Northgate system for Housing Options cases and have to double input all information onto the CBL system to create an application for social housing, (approximately 20 applications per month being dual input onto systems). Abrisas is not currently set up to link intuitively with other IT systems, we do have basic interfaces set up but these do come with an additional cost and can fall over leading to further manual input by staff into the Abrisas and Northgate systems.

- The NYHC policy short listing criteria gives higher ranking to those applicants who are housing debt free. However, Abrisas is not currently configured to link to other systems and is not intuitive in the way it could use information from other systems which hold the debt information so all applications have to be manually checked for debt. In addition to this any partner landlord current tenant is not normally allowed to transfer when they have current rent arrears, this also requires manual checks as the systems are not linked, taking a substantial amount of staff time during the short listing process.
- CYC Housing are currently reviewing all IT systems to review our current systems and how they deliver service, interact with each other etc and look at what else is available that is integrated and can offer efficiencies and deliver a more reliable system for both staff and customers.

30. **Decision 3** - Should properties be offered via a 'Choice Based Lettings' system or via an allocation process by officers that is transparent for applicants?

31. Currently the main system for allocating a vacant property, either owned by CYC or other social housing (Registered Social Landlord) is via Choice Based Lettings, whereby registered applicants can 'bid' on available properties. This gives applicants a clear understanding of what is available and what the likelihood of being offered a property is (they are ranked). When more than 1 applicant bids on a property, a tie break system will operate **housing need – assessed bedroom need - debt - time** in that order. Currently in York there are 1600+ applicants on the register but we only have around 500 voids pa. Many applicants are never offered a property, many applicants are disappointed as there is

only limited 'choice' as housing providers may not own properties in an applicants preferred area, they may prefer a house but only flats are available

32. Advantages of Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

The applicant can see available properties and choose where they may want to live, applicants are aware of limited supply, their position on the shortlist, the likelihood of being offered the property they bid on. Whilst the CBL systems are perceived as been transparent the information that the current system is configured to provide to customers about lettings and their chances of accessing social housing in their chosen area of the NYHC partnership area is minimal, it advises who properties are allocated to by band, however this does not give an insight into time on the register or reason for priority banding award, nor does it summarise the number of vacancies per year by property type and size compared the number of available properties to give customers a realistic picture of social housing availability in the York and North Yorkshire Home Choice area.

33. There is the possibility of CBL for some customer groups – removing it for statutory homeless as this is a process and not a choice and removing it for those in higher bands (need) if they are not bidding on all suitable properties in order to resolve someone's housing need as soon as possible.

34. Disadvantages: whilst there is perceived choice it is limited choice because the number of availability of properties is low , many people are unrealistic and do not use the bidding system effectively (often bidding for properties they are not eligible for), those with high housing need (emergency and gold band) continue to live in inappropriate accommodation in the hope that their 'perfect' house will come available.

35. Advantages of Officer Allocation

More attention can be given to the individual needs and issues, that allocations can be made in real time (ie allocation at point of notice / not on a weekly cycle), possibly reduce void times allocation based on personal / detailed information from customers, that those in most housing need will be offered a property as soon as possible rather than waiting to bid on the 'ideal property'. To ensure transparency we would want to continue to produce regular and enhanced information which would be available for customers to view informing them of lets by area, property type and priority banding allocation. We would also like to ensure that customers can view their application on line to see if they are

being skipped for offers and why so any issues they can make contact and address, such as outstanding current or former rent arrears. Officer allocations would ensure that the applicant is only offered properties that they are eligible for which would improve the turn around time and reduce void loss.

36. Disadvantages

The customer would not see what is vacant (perceived less transparency), applicants would not have actual physical choice of what properties to bid on but would be offered a property based on the detailed information provided to officers at point of application

37. When we began the Service Development Review in May/June 2015 we did survey customers through survey monkey and via direct phone calls from an independent member of staff to ask for their thoughts on the current system and the way things worked.

38. One of the questions posed to customers was “Do you think NYHC/CBL is the best way to allocate homes” of the 41 responses

- 9.8% said they strongly agreed CBL was the best way to allocate properties
- 29.3% said they agreed that CBL was the best way to allocate properties.
- 39% said they did not know what the best way to allocate homes was
- 9.8% said they disagreed that CBL was the best way to allocate homes
- 12.2% said they strongly disagreed that CBL was the best way to allocate homes
- In summary 39% of those asked stated that they thought CBL was the best way to allocate homes, 39% didn't know and 22% disagreed that CBL was the best way to allocate homes.

39. Recent consultation with customers about the current CBL system has been fairly inconclusive when it comes to satisfaction with the current system 389 customers were contacted to ask for their opinions with only a 5.6% response;

- Customers were asked if they preferred the current CBL system or would prefer an alternative system where properties were allocated by a team of staff, 55% of those who responded said they preferred CBL whilst 45% stated they would prefer properties to be allocated to them.

40. **Decision 4** – Should there be a physical (on-line and/or paper) waiting list application form or is there an online system to log and interest and then staff offer personal interviews asking relevant questions only. An IT system / ‘waiting list’ would still exist but as a back office function which customers could view. A ‘view ‘ page would still exist so applicants could check their application details / history.
41. Advantages of Waiting List Application Form  
Applicants can complete all details in own home / own time by either paper or on-line. Applicants can contact staff via IT system with updates / messages.
42. Disadvantages  
Applications (especially on line) are often incorrect, incomplete, applicant is required to fill in entire application even when not relevant, applicant does not get realistic advice at first point of contact, unmediated access to registration raises expectations which cannot be fulfilled, due to cost / complexity of current IT system any changes to process / form is difficult / costly to implement. When looking at the application process a high level of failure demand was identified:
- All applications are turned into a demand for housing
  - The website and applying on line encourages applications and does little to inform customers about their realistic chances of being offered a home.
  - The initial assessment period can be open ended depending on whether the form is completed fully enough
  - On line application forms can be lengthy as they aim to cover every eventuality within a policy, many applicants not needing to answer all of the questions.
  - Due to the amount of information required up front there is scope for a significant proportion of incomplete applications resulting in delays to processing.
43. **Decision 5** - Regardless of decisions 1 - 4, CYC are required by law to have an allocations policy which sets out eligibility criteria, qualification criteria and gives reasonable preference to certain categories of applicants. Furthermore, there is no intention to fundamentally review the policy as it is fit for purpose. However, there are a small number of significant alterations which need consideration, in particular those denying access to the register where there is no housing need including:
- Introduction of 2 year local connection. Need to keep abreast of Government directives which are talking about 4 year residency?

- removing general need applicants with no housing need from the register (bronze band) but allow elderly who would not otherwise be able to resolve their own housing need who may not traditionally be classed as in housing need (owner occupiers, income / savings above £60k) to register as older persons accommodation is occasionally let to those with no housing need, alternatively having a 'reserve list' for people with no housing need who could only bid on 'hard to let' properties or intermediate rent, affordable homes.
- no Potentially Homeless Gold band for Family licence termination (living with family)
- no silver band for sharing with family with no other housing need,
- reduce number of offers to 2 (1 for accepted homeless) to reduce number of refusals and void times, removal of good tenant. Customer consultation inconclusive
- Remove choice for accepted homeless

44. Other minor changes might include:

- Changing the criteria for 2 bed (age of sharing same sex suggested 16 not 21 in line with Housing Benefit criteria) as highest demand ,
- Adult children in residential care do not entitle someone to a 2 bedroom need
- The option to utilise auto bid for all applicants in emergency or gold band if bidding inappropriately or not bidding (if remain CBL)
- Other considerations e.g. Welfare Benefit reforms LHA. Looking at diversification of tenancies, reconfiguration of stock – need for shared accommodation (CYC Houses in multiple occupation), bedsits for under 35.
- Implications of Housing and Planning Act 2016. To define criteria and introduce fixed term tenancies. Consultation / links with LL services

45. Any changes to policy, either within NYHC or stand alone would be subject to customer consultation, legal opinion and NYHC partnership / Board and member agreement). Other proposals for changes may be identified following consultation.

46. While there are many minor changes which would be addressed when the allocation policy is changed, the main consideration for Scrutiny relates to the service review and the proposals to:

- i. Remove those who have no housing need – i.e. those currently in suitable accommodation (e.g. in private rented accommodation with



no notice to quit and with no affordability issues, and those living in the family home with no housing need)

- ii. Remove the 'potentially homeless' gold band status for those living at home, restricting it only to someone with a legal notice (mortgage repossession, discharge from HM Forces – cessation notice, potential eviction from a tenancy). The applicant living at home would be assessed no housing need.

47. Cost of processing Bronze band applications:

Cost of processing Bronze band applicants					
New applicants per annum (2014/15)	No. placed in Bronze band (31%)	Staff time in hrs per application	Total staff time spent processing Bronze band applications per annum (excluding band appeal, ongoing Change in circs/Amends etc)	Average staff cost per hour £	Total staff cost per year for Bronze band applications £
2711	840	2	1681	13.30	<b>22,355</b>

48. Advantages of Amending the Allocations Policy

Changes to current policy will meet legal and local needs and make lettings and allocation policy more focused on those in housing need. It will reduce demand for registration and thus improve efficiency within the team, contributing to the required budget savings (£50,000 in 2018/19 due to reduction in Housing Revenue Account income – 1% rent reduction), staff would have additional time as a result of efficiencies within the overall process to give personalised advice to individuals, to develop alternative housing options (further develop starter home / affordable home register).

- 49. There could be an option should the waiting list be exhausted for a property, to take a property shop approach potentially utilising Home Swapper (CYC preferred Mutual exchange system) or any other general property rental web site to advertise the property and let on a first come basis, following the policy to check eligibility and qualification for social housing or activate the reserve list (see above).

50. Disadvantages

Some proposed changes would result in those with no housing need being removed from the register which would be unpopular, those living in family homes with no housing need being removed from the register, reduced choice, possible minor increase in homelessness (although current proposal at national level to change to homeless legislation to make prevention a legal duty).

51. Outside of the changes proposed to the policy above, there are a number of internal changes / improvements that do not require member decision at this point e.g.:

- Adult children in residential care do not entitle someone to an additional bedroom need
- Option to utilise autobid for all applicants in emergency or gold band if bidding inappropriately or not bidding (if remain CBL)
- Other considerations are - Welfare Benefit reforms LHA. Look at diversification of tenancies, reconfiguration of stock – need for shared accommodation (CYC Houses in multiple occupation), bedsits for under 35.
- Implications of Housing and Planning Act 2016. To define criteria and introduce fixed term tenancies. Consultation / links with LL services (which will be considered in Tenancy Strategy)

### **Scrutiny Review Conclusions**

52. Having considered all of the information provided in support of this review the Task Group agreed the following:

- Regardless of changes to the council's Housing Registrations Policy, the Task Group recognised that a new IT system was required – one that was capable of talking to other CYC systems, would enable customers to view and update personal information, and provide customers with more information about lettings and their chances of accessing social housing in their chosen areas, thereby reducing failure demand. The Task Group acknowledged there would be a cost associated with replacing the IT system. However they recognised it would also help generate savings elsewhere in the process which would mitigate that cost.
- The Task Group could see the benefit of having a mixed approach system i.e. choice based lettings for some customer groups initially,

with the option for officers to allocate if customers are not placing sufficient bids to resolve their housing need. However, they also recognised it had the potential to result in a duplication of officer time, an increase in costs associated with running dual IT systems, and create confusion amongst customers. They therefore agreed they had insufficient information on the associated implications to recommend a mixed approach, and agreed this option needed exploring further by housing officers as part of their ongoing review.

- Customers should be offered personal appointments to assist them in their application for housing, in order to reduce the time it takes to successfully apply and to allow staff to provide realistic advice on their chances of being offered a home. An online waiting list should also be made available to view so that customers can check it at their convenience and reduce the number of inquiries made.
- Based on the reducing social housing stock, that general need applicants with no housing need should be removed from the register with some exceptions e.g. the elderly requiring older persons accommodation, together with those who are 'potentially homeless' i.e. those living at home.
- In response to the removal of the 'bronze band' a reserve list for people with no housing need could be introduced to allow them to bid on 'hard to let' properties and affordable homes etc.

53. Overall, in regard to delivery of the register, the Task Group agreed that CYC should initially try to re-negotiate with their regional partners to revise the current Housing Registrations System and Policy to take account of the findings from the officer review. If this is not successful, CYC should withdraw from the partnership and look to form a mini partnership with Selby and/or Ryedale. Failing that the Task Group agreed CYC should initiate its own policy.

54. Finally, the Task Group agreed that:

- Consideration should be given to reconfiguring the council's social housing stock e.g. the introduction of multiple occupation social housing opportunities for suitable applicants;
- The need for additional social housing across the city needs addressing through the Local Plan.

- Planning guidance should better reflect the urgent need for more affordable family homes to alleviate the pressure on the city's 2/3-bed social housing stock.

## **Council Plan**

55. The Housing Registration Scrutiny Review supports the council's priorities to listen to residents and deliver frontline services.

## **Review Recommendations**

56. The Task Group recommends that the following be introduced / implemented:
- i) A new IT system
  - ii) Personal interviews for new applicants
  - iii) An online waiting list for applicants to view
  - iv) That both the bronze band and the 'potentially homeless' gold band status be removed from the allocations policy, with some minor exceptions
57. The Task Group also recommends that:
- v) Housing officers give further consideration to the implications of introducing a mixed approach to allocations i.e. some choice based lettings for some customer groups initially, with the option for officers to allocate if customers are not placing sufficient bids to resolve their housing need.
58. Although not directly linked to the review of the allocations system, the Task Group also recommends:
- vi) That the council endeavours to add to its housing stock in the future through the introduction of multiple occupation properties.
  - vii) That the council proactively increase the availability of social housing through the Local Plan
  - viii) That revisions may be required to planning guidance in order to encourage the building of more affordable family homes and help address the pressure on the city's 2/3-bed social housing stock

59. Finally, in regard to the current the sub regional partnership, Task Group recommends that:

viii) CYC re-negotiates the current arrangements in order to address the findings from CYC's officer review. Should this prove unsuccessful the Task Group recommends that CYC withdraw from that partnership and attempt to negotiate a new mini partnership with a reduced number of other specific local authorities in order to focus on the needs of York residents and those in the closest locality.

Reason: To inform the ongoing Allocations Service Development Officer Review and conclude the scrutiny review in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols, thereby enabling this draft final report to be presented to the Community & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting on 18 July 2016.

### **Implications & Risk Management**

60. All implications and risks associated with any recommended changes to the council's current allocations policy will be assessed as part of the ongoing Allocations Service Development Officer Review. The findings from this scrutiny review will help to inform that assessment.

### **Contact Details**

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**Report Approved**  **Date** 27 June 2016

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** N/A

**Wards Affected:**

All



**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:** N/A

### **Annexes:**

**Annex A** – Overview of Demands Being Placed on Council Housing & Current CYC Housing Policy

**Annex B** – Locality Report on Diseconomies

**Annex C** – Allocations Service Development Officer Review Phase I final Report

**Annex D** – Officer Proposals for Phase II of Allocations Services Development Officer Review

**Annex E** – Table of Options

**Abbreviations:**

**NYHC** - North Yorkshire Homes Choice

**CYC** – City of York Council

**CBL** – Choice Based Lettings

**LHA** – Local Housing Authority