

Report of the Assistant Director – Housing & Community Safety

## **Update report on Housing Allocations & Choice Based Lettings Update**

### **Background**

1. A previous report was presented to the former Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee on 18 July 2016 which set out a series of options regarding the future involvement of City of York Council (CYC) with North Yorkshire Home Choice (NYHC) common allocations policy and choice based lettings system.
2. The report outlined officers' concerns in relation to North Yorkshire Home Choice, including the IT system, internal process, sub regional consistency and benefit to York residents.
3. A Task Group was established to participate in an ongoing officer review and 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 to be addressed 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.

### **The Current Position**

4. The situation has changed since Task Group made its recommendations in the following ways:
  - Internal changes have taken place in respect of some concerns around efficiency and duplication through the service review of

the CYC Housing Registrations Team. This restructure, which commenced on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016, has enabled the team to deliver face to face or personal telephone interviews rather than online applications with all customers and consequently staff are able to give more personal / realistic housing advice. Outcomes include the reduction in applications from those with no housing need and improved service to customers, up front realistic advice and a single named contact, although some customers are still dissatisfied as we are unable to offer accommodation in a timescale to suit them.

- The project to replace all Housing ICT systems is underway and due for implementation 2018/19. This should address issues with void times. The existing ICT system is inflexible and requires significant manual intervention and creates failure demand.
- The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (comes into force 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018) has introduced new statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, recording and statistical requirements which will impact on any IT system.
- That consultation has taken place with stakeholders and staff to develop a draft CYC allocations policy.
- Discussions with partners in NYHC have taken place and all other partners remain committed to NYHC for the foreseeable future. They do not wish to form a mini-partnership with York as an alternative.
- Partners have indicated that if York left NYHC they would work with us via CYC allocation policy. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) would not guarantee 100% vacancies but would revert to historic nomination rights (circa 70%). Some RSL's would not apply a local connection to the remaining 30%.
- Recent announcements regarding amendments to current welfare benefits regulations in particular that local housing allowance will not be applied to social rents and as such the pressure to provide more bedsits shared housing has reduced.

5. Current NYHC statistics show the move to personal contact reduced demand in York for households with little / no housing need.

		Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	TOTAL
31/3/14	York	3	220	1166	922	2311
	Sub Region	19	804	3864	5474	10161
31/3/16	York	3	213	878	518	1612
	Sub region	10	627	2792	3409	6838
12/10/17	York	2	224	988	462	1676
	Sub region	9	689	3000	3287	6985

6. Statistics also show that overall more people move from the York area than in to York via NYHC. For example:

- In January 2016 14 households moved from York to other partner areas with 9 moving in.
- In October 2017 15 households left York for other partner areas and 7 moved in.

See **Annex A** for more detailed information on these months for movement across partner areas. Whilst this is one of the advantages of the partnership this has to be balanced against the inefficiencies of the system and inflexibility of the ICT system.

7. There are some proposed changes to NYHC policy agreed by the board. These will be implemented shortly subject to legal advice on these currently being sought.

- Financial Assessments to be completed for applicants.
- All non-bidders will receive a letter on a 12 month rolling review basis. They will be given 28 days to contact us in order to remain on the register and will need to re-register if the application is ended.
- Sharing Facilities – this would only apply to non family members in a household who would retain Silver Band
- Good Tenant Scheme maximum band silver rather than moving up a band as happens currently where the maximum band is gold.
- Reduction in the age to qualify for a bedroom without the need to share from 21 to 16 in line with benefits legislation. Currently policy allocates a bedroom to an adult 21 years or above, which

means that you could have a 20 year old of the same sex sharing with a 6 year old.

8. CYC is committed to NYHC until the new CYC IT system is introduced but a decision is required in summer 2018 in order to incorporate any changes into the new IT system. The proposed policy makes reference to new legislation, in particular the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

### **A draft allocation and lettings policy for City of York Council area**

9. In the event that CYC decide to leave the NYHC partnership there would be a need for a York specific policy that RSLs with stock would adopt for York based properties that they own and where CYC enjoy nomination rights.
10. A draft policy based on initial consultations with partners and staff is currently being finalised.
11. The significant changes between the NYHC policy and the proposed York specific policy will be contained in the public consultation process. These can be found at **Annex B** and include:
  - Information on different aspects of the policy
  - Reason for having them in the policy
  - An agree / disagree indicator with a request for comments

### **Consultation**

12. The statutory public consultation on this policy will take place during January and March 2018 with a paper to executive for final decisions in June 2018
13. Members of the this committee are invited to take part in the formal consultation.

### **Council Plan 2015-19**

23. A review of the Council's Housing Allocations process would support the Council's priorities to focus on frontline services and listen to residents.

## Implications & Risk Management

24. There are no implications or risks associated with the recommendation in this report.

## Recommendations

25. Members are asked to:
- I. Note the information in this report
  - II. Consider and comment on leaving the NYHC partnership and allocation policy
  - III. Consider and comment on the method for allocating properties via a York allocation and letting policy (direct lets or choice based lettings)
  - IV. Consider and, comment on the significant changes as detailed in **Annex B** to form part of the overall consultation.

Reason: To proceed with the work on the allocations policy for York residents (subject to formal decision) and of scrutiny in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols

## Contact Details

### Author:

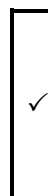
Becky Ward, Service  
Manager, Homelessness  
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Denis Southall, Head of  
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### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Tom Brittain  
AD Housing & Community Safety

### Report Approved



Date 5/01/2017

**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 – Movement between NYHC partner areas

Annex B – Draft consultation document on substantial changes in allocation and lettings policies

## **Abbreviations:**

NYHC - North Yorkshire Homes Choice

CYC – City of York Council

RSL – Registered Social Landlord