



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 22ND MAY 2014

SUBJECT: A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON HOUSING REGISTER & COMMON ALLOCATION POLICY

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the CHTG with an update on the progress being made on the development of the common housing register (CHR) and common allocation policy (CAP).

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The project is being taken forward through a partnership approach, led by officers from the private sector housing team.
- 2.2 A number of working groups have been established to progress key elements of the project.
- 2.3 A comprehensive action plan has been produced, which details those actions that will need to be carried out to successfully complete the project in the prescribed timescales.
- 2.4 There is a target date of April 2015 for the implementation of the CHR and CAP, but the achievement of this may be dependent on a suitable IT solution being procured.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 By designing a system that markedly improves the experience of customers, by providing fairness and flexibility in terms of outcome and process, the development of a CHR and CAP links to the following strategies:
- the national housing strategy for Wales – ‘*Improving Lives and Communities*’ (Welsh Government, 2010);
 - Caerphilly Delivers: The Single Integrated Plan (2013-17); and
 - *People, Property & Place: A Housing Strategy for Caerphilly County Borough.*

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 A report titled, ‘*Allocations Policy – Proposals For The Adoption Of A Banding System & A Common Housing Waiting List*’ was presented to Cabinet in December 2010. The report proposed substantial amendments to the way the council assessed and prioritised applications for housing. Following discussion on the content of the report it was recommended to Cabinet that the proposal contained within the report be agreed in principle and that the future progression of the scheme be deferred pending the outcome of the stock transfer ballot.

- 4.2 A further report titled, '*The Development of a Common Housing Register & Common Allocation Policy*' was presented to the CHTG in October 2012. The report sought approval to jointly establish a CHR and CAP. This report seeks to set out the work undertaken by officers to date to establish a CHR and CAP.
- 4.3 Before initiating the project, a series of exploratory meetings were arranged early in 2013 with the council's housing association partners, those organisations with which a CHR would be formed. These meetings were successful in enabling the council to gain an understanding from the housing associations, which are party to CHRs in other local authority areas, of what worked well and what did not work well. These meetings ultimately allowed all partners to agree how the project should be taken forward.
- 4.4 Officers from the private sector housing team are leading on the project. Partners to the project include the council's public sector housing team and the following housing associations, Charter (part of the Seren group), Linc Cymru, United Welsh and Wales & West. Other housing associations wanting to be part of the CHR but currently unable to commit resources to the project include Aelwyd and Cadwyn.
- 4.5 A workshop session was held in May 2013 with Andy Gale, housing consultant. The session was held to explore the range of options available to the council when it comes to developing the CAP. Options considered included the introduction of a banding system, determining who qualifies for an award of reasonable preference, use of local lettings policies and the requirement to consult on the draft policy.
- 4.6 In July 2013, a second workshop session was held with partners. The session was based on the 'building blocks' exercise developed by the then Scottish Executive. The exercise was undertaken both from the perspective of the landlord and the housing applicant and a report of the session was produced and disseminated to partners. The session was very successful in that it enabled partners to establish the key principals that would underpin the development of the CHR, which includes the council assuming responsibility for maintaining the CHR post implementation and the development of an enhanced housing options service for those applying for housing.

Working Groups

- 4.7 In terms of project management, partners agreed that the project should be progressed through the establishment of four working groups. Requests were sent to partners in September 2013 seeking nominations to each of the groups from their respective organisations. The first meetings of the groups took place in October/November 2013.
- 4.8 The working groups meet on a monthly basis. The following is a brief update on the key achievements to date of each group:
- Applicant Engagement – this group decided to approach its task of ensuring that applicants, including existing tenants, are fully engaged throughout the process in two stages. The first stage was to recruit a core group of tenants to work alongside officers. Tenants from the council and housing associations, who were already formally engaged in participation frameworks, were invited along to a 'taster session' held at the beginning of December 2013. Nine tenants attended the session. Tenants subsequently completed a survey form, indicating whether they wanted to be involved in the project and which group they would prefer to sit on. In order to prepare them for joining the working groups, those wanting to be involved attended a second session in January 2014. With the exception of the ICT group, three tenants were subsequently placed on each of the other three working groups. All tenants are now actively involved with the work of the groups, with the support of mentors.
 - Common Allocation Policy – this group is currently tasked with the largest piece of work. It has developed a draft banding system to replace the current points system and is now in the process of agreeing the qualifying circumstances for each of the reasonable preference categories within the bands. It has also identified a list of other areas that need to be considered before the draft CAP can be developed. These issues have been scheduled into the group's meetings up to July.

- Information Communication Technology – the work of this group is heavily influenced by the work of the CAP working group. Its role will be to produce an IT specification based on the requirements of the CHR and CAP. The IT specification will be used to assess the capabilities of the current IT system. If the current system is unable to fully meet the requirements, with or without enhancement, then a new IT system will need to be procured, which could impact on the project timescales. The group is also in the process of developing an information sharing protocol, in accordance with the Wales Accord for Sharing Personal Information (WASPI), which will govern the sharing of information between partners for the purpose of processing housing applications. The group is also considering the practicalities of creating a single list of applicants from the multiple lists that currently exist.
- Communication & Information – this group will ensure that all key stakeholders to the project are kept informed of the progress being made. To date this group has carried out an exercise to identify the stakeholders to the project and the range of techniques used by all partners to communicate with said stakeholders. It is now in the process of developing a frequently asked question fact sheet, a web page and producing a briefing note for staff.

- 4.9 It is a statutory requirement for local authorities to have an adopted allocation scheme. The CAP, therefore, will need to be formally approved by members after a period of consultation. To make members aware of the project and the general areas of consideration a seminar was held in January 2014, facilitated by Andy Gale, and a briefing paper was produced. A second seminar is planned to update members in June prior to commencement of the consultation exercise on the draft CAP.

Low Cost Home Ownership/ Intermediate Rental Register

- 4.10 One of the overarching principals of the project is to increase the level of choice offered to applicants. As part of the project, consideration is being given as to whether to incorporate the process of applying for low cost home ownership (LCHO) and intermediate rental (IR) properties into the CHR framework. Although the scope for LCHO and IR falls outside of the remit of the CAP, with each element having its own eligibility criteria, there are benefits to adopting such an approach both from the applicants' and council's perspective. This piece of work is currently on going and will be reported to members as part of the requirement to report on the CHR and CAP project.

Timetable

- 4.11 The table below shows indicative timescales and key milestones for the development and introduction of the CHR and CAP:

Produce draft CAP and complete an equality impact assessment (EIA)	By 30 th Jun 2014
Consult on CAP and EIA (12 weeks)	1 st Jul 2014 – 30 th Sep 2014
Consider consultation responses	1 st – 31 st Oct 2014
Adoption of CAP (process TBC): • CHTG • Scrutiny committee • Cabinet • Full council	31 st Oct 2014 – 31 st Jan 2015
ICT requirements* – assess and, where applicable, accommodate	1 st Jul – 31 st Dec 2014
Testing of ICT system	1 st Jan – 1 st Mar 2015
Sign-off – legal agreements, service level agreements, associated procedures	1 st Jan – 31 st Mar 2015
Create a single list of applicants	1 st Jan – 31 st Mar 2015
Staff training and publicity	1 st Jan – 31 st Mar 2015
Go live – launch event	1 st Apr 2015
Post implementation – monitoring and evaluation	1 st Apr 2015 onwards

*Date may need to be extended if a new ICT system needs to be procured, which in turn could delay the 'go live' date.

Action plan

- 4.12 A comprehensive action plan has been produced, which details those actions that will need to be carried out to successfully complete the project in the prescribed timescales. There is a process of continually updating the plan as tasks are identified, commenced and completed. At present, good progress is being made overall against those active actions contained within the plan.

The Next Steps

- 4.13 Officers foresee that the main focus of partners over the course of the next few months will be the production of a draft CAP and an IT specification. In terms of the duration of the consultation exercise, partners have agreed to adopt the Welsh Government recommended period of 12 weeks. It is anticipated that the consultation period will open at the beginning of July and close at the end of September. To encourage a satisfactory response rate, a series of consultation events will be arranged around the borough and partners' communication officers will be utilised to help raise awareness. Consultation responses will be considered during October and the process of adopting a finalised CAP will commence at the end of the same month.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equality implications arising directly out of the production of this report.
- 5.2 Local authorities need to ensure that their allocation schemes are compliant with the full range of duties under the 2010 Equality Act, such as the elimination of unlawful discrimination, and the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. The CAP and related policies will be subject to an equality impact assessment.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly out of the production of this report.
- 6.2 There will be a range of financial implications associated with the development and maintenance of the CHR. The costs will vary according to the level of complexity of the system that is ultimately designed. A detailed financial assessment will be undertaken to establish the level of capital and revenue costs.
- 6.3 There is also a potential for all parties involved in the CHR and CAP to make efficiency savings as running a shared system reduces the repetition of staff effort. Many of the centralised revenue costs associated with running the CHR will replace costs to individual partners.
- 6.4 The implementation of the CHR and CAP may require the purchase of a new, specialist, IT system. The capital cost of purchase is thought to be approximately £50,000 with additional modules costing around £15,000 each. Typically, local authorities in the region that have introduced CHRs and CAPs have covered the capital cost of purchasing the IT system and sought contributions from the partners towards the on-going, revenue costs of maintaining and operating the system.
- 6.5 The council will assume responsibility for the majority of the on going costs of the maintaining the CHR and CAP, with the remainder being pro-rata'd between the partners. Typically, the costs could be pro-rata'd based on either total stock size or the number of lettings per annum basis. The exact arrangement will need to be agreed by all partners.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications arising directly out of the production of this report.
- 7.2 Consideration will need to be given to the development of a dedicated, centralised team that will be responsible for the post implementation maintenance and monitoring of the CHR and CAP. Logically this will follow detailed discussions with partners on the specific nature of the common housing register that is to be implemented. The type of model implemented will dictate the associated structure and costs.
- 7.3 Officers propose that the centralised team will be situated, as it is now, within the private sector housing team, so that it can be closely aligned with the strategic housing and homelessness prevention functions. This could involve, but is not limited to, incorporating staff currently responsible for maintaining the council's allocations system within this team and/or seconding allocations staff from the housing associations. Before any decision is taken, there will need to be some form of assessment on the skill sets and experience required for these roles once a structure has been established.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 All views of consultees have been incorporated into this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 This report is for information purposes only. Members of the CHTG are asked to note its content.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 N/A.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.
- 11.2 Code of Guidance for Local Authorities: Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2012.

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