



Report Reference Number: S/18/7

To: Scrutiny Committee
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Title: Housing Tenant Services Update

Summary:

Our corporate plan has four key ambitions and our Housing service specifically supports the aims to make Selby District a great place to enjoy life, a great place to make a difference and through delivering great value.

Our Housing Tenants Services Team is responsible for tenancy and estate management. They work with key partners to tackle ASB and work closely with our Enforcement Team to tackle tenancy breaches.

The team administer all applications for housing and are responsible for our council house allocations. They administer mutual exchanges, successions and assignments and support tenants to sustain tenancies.

Our Housing Options Team offer advice and guidance to anyone facing homelessness. As demand for affordable housing remains high the team are continuing to develop links to private rented sector landlords to help widen the housing options available to our customers.

Recommendations:

To note the content of the report and consider how the Committee might contribute to the consultation on the Plan.

Reasons for recommendation

The report is intended to inform the scrutiny committee on the current position of elements of housing service delivery.

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1** This report provides an update on some key elements on housing delivery and provides some specific information on applications for housing, council

house allocations, Housing Options, Right to Buy and the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan review.

2. The Report

2.1 Selby District Council properties

Selby District Council is the main provider of social housing in the Selby District. At the end of 17/18 the total number of properties owned by the Council was 3044. As a comparison there were 3140, 96 less, at the end of 2012/13.

Table i. Properties owned by Selby District Council by type

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	5-bed	Total
Bedsits/Flats and Houses	222	627	1,000	36	2	1,887
Bungalows	521	636	0	0	0	1,157
Total	743	1,263	1,000	36	2	3,044

Housing stock numbers have continued to reduce as a result of Right to Buy and the pace of sales has increased following a relaxation of the eligibility criteria. Right to Buy allows most council tenants to buy their council home at a discount and to be eligible a tenant must be a secure tenant and have held a tenancy with a public sector landlord for 3 years.

In 17/18 21 properties were sold through the Right to Buy over the last 5 years a total of 96 properties have been sold. Of the properties sold through the right to buy, 75% were 3 bed houses.

In addition during this period 15 properties were demolished to support regeneration plans and 15 new properties have been built by the Council with plans approved to develop more.

The new houses developed by the Council at Byram and Eggborough were the first new council homes in the district for 25 years. Further developments are already planned and work has started on the development of a further 13 homes at Byram Park Road, Byram. This is part of a larger, ambitious housing development programme that our Housing and Regeneration Team are leading on.

The Council also currently manages 5 affordable properties owned by Selby and District Housing Trust.

2.2 Voids and allocations

Demand for our council housing remains high. When properties are re-let they are advertised through North Yorkshire Home Choice which provides choice based lettings allocations.

The North Yorkshire Choice Based Lettings Partnership operates in Craven, Richmond, Ryedale, Hambleton, Scarborough, Selby and York. Harrogate Borough Council has never joined the partnership and run a separate scheme.

Customers apply on-line and then their application is assessed and verified by officers and the applicant is awarded a band to identify their priority for housing: Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze. The Bronze category is considered the category for those without a 'Housing need'. All applicants must have a local connection to North Yorkshire and unless there is a specific Local Letting Initiative in place the Policy enables them to move freely across the partnership area. This means that applicants from Selby can choose to apply to live in any of the other partner areas and likewise applicants from across the partnership area can bid on properties in the Selby District.

Local letting Initiatives may be introduced by partners to respond to local housing need and demand within a specific build or area. They are used to ensure best management of housing stock and support rural areas with regards to demand. Where there is a specific planning agreement advertised properties will refer to a S106 planning agreement which provides criteria that must be met to enable a bid to be successful.

We have introduced local lettings initiatives for a number of new developments across the Selby District.

Each week available properties are advertised and active applicants are able to bid on suitable properties they are interested in. The bidder with the highest priority for social housing gets first refusal of a property that has been advertised providing all the relevant criteria are met.

Choice Based lettings are considered to give greater customer choice and be more transparent than a traditional direct lettings system.

Currently there are 632 active applications registered with Selby District Council. The applicants fall into the following priority bands.

Table ii. Number of applicants by priority band

	Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Number of Applicants	0	49	294	288	631

In quarter 4 of 17/18 we started 45 tenancies of which 10 applicants were in gold band, 29 in silver and 6 in bronze.

Demand is highest for 1 bed general needs properties.

Table iii. Number of applicants divided by maximum bedroom need

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4 and 5-bed	Total
General needs (applicant is under 60)	221	210	70	15	516
Sheltered (applicant is over 60)	97	15	3	0	115
Total	318	225	73	15	631

In 2017/18 we re-let 210 properties. The average time taken to re-let our council properties in 2017/18 was 34 days.

Table iv. Number of properties re-let in 17/18 broken down by property type

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4 and 5-bed	Total
General Needs	21	57	34	3	115
Sheltered	49	46	0	0	95
Total	70	103	34	3	210

2.3 Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) self-financing commenced in April 2012 and now local housing authorities are able to fully retain the money they receive in rent in order to plan and provide services to their current and future tenants. Our current housing revenue account business plan sets out the income and expenditure projections for our housing stock. A review of the plan will take place in 2018.

The new plan will link to the Corporate Plan and will set out our vision for the housing service. We will be consulting with key stakeholders during the development of the plan and there will be an opportunity for members and for tenants to contribute their views before the final report is presented to the Executive for approval.

The review will consider the current operating context and what is on the horizon that might impact our future service delivery and will specifically cover how we continue to deliver value for money services. A key element will be

how we invest in our current homes to ensure we are continuing to provide decent homes that meet the needs and aspirations of our tenants.

2.4 Housing Options

Our Housing Options Team who are based at our customer contact centre work with anyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to try and enable them to stay in their homes or help them find alternative accommodation. We aim to be proactive and offer assistance early to prevent or relieve homelessness. Through taking this approach there has been a reduction in the number of applications for assistance and a reduction in the number of households found to be homeless.

In 2017/18 323 households approached us for assistance. Of these, 281 were prevented from becoming homeless either through direct interventions or with advice and assistance. Just 42 made homeless applications and 17 of which were found to be eligible, unintentional, priority need households who we had a duty to accommodate. The reason for approaches is varied but the highest reasons are usually because the household has received a notice to end their current tenancy or a relationship has broken down.

The new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force on 3rd April 2018 and this new legislation changes the way in which local authorities will both prevent and relieve homelessness in our areas and has brought in new specific legislative duties. Whilst the new duties enforce much of the work that Selby District Council already undertakes, it places significantly increased responsibilities in relation to time spent on an individual homelessness investigation.

A key focus now will be trying to maintain a customer's current accommodation rather than immediately looking for something alternative.

We also are supporting customers to access private rented sector housing. This is a key area for us to focus on and will link closely to our work to bring privately owned empty properties back into use.

3.0 Implications

3.1 Legal Implications

As this report is providing information only there are no specific legal implications.

3.2 Financial Implications

As this report is providing information only there are no specific financial implications.

4.0 Conclusion

The report provides information that shows demand for our council housing remains high. The choice based lettings system allows applicants to bid for houses in our area and across the partnership area. Our Neighbourhood Officers and our Housing Options advisors advise customers how to bid and what their expectations can be.

The review of the HRA Business Plan will commence in July, with the revised plan being presented to The Executive in December. Development of the Plan will include consultation with our tenants.

Members' views on the future of Council Housing will also be sought; Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider how the Committee might contribute to the consultation on the Plan.

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