

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development

Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee: 2 September 2009

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Common Housing Register 'HomeSearch'

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on progress in the development of the Common Housing Register (CHR) in partnership with local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

2. Background

- 2.1** The Scottish Government encourages all local authorities to develop Common Housing Registers in partnership with their local RSLs. The purpose of a CHR is defined by the Scottish Government as 'A group of landlords devising a single application form by which anyone seeking housing in their area can register their need and specify their housing preferences. Participating landlords can then prioritise and select applicants from a single pool of applicants'.
- 2.2** The possibility of developing a CHR in West Dunbartonshire was first discussed in 2003. At that time a Project Board was established and following a successful grant application in August 2004, funding was obtained from the then Scottish Executive to appoint a Project Officer for an initial 1 year period. The officer was appointed in August 2004.
- 2.3** It was agreed that 'HomeSearch' would be the name of the West Dunbartonshire Common Housing Register. Working groups were established to take forward the various aspects of the project.
- 2.4** After the Project Officer left, no further action was taken in terms of formally taking the project forward.
- 2.5** In January 2008, with the support of the Scottish Housing Best Value Network, a meeting was arranged with officers from Housing services and representatives from the local RSLs. At that time, it was agreed that there was a commitment to work in partnership, with a view to developing a fully functional CHR within West Dunbartonshire.
- 2.6** It was agreed that the name 'HomeSearch' would be retained.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The CHR is being developed in tandem with the ongoing review of West Dunbartonshire Council's own Allocations policy.
- 3.2** Discussions are ongoing, in relation to the development of a Common Allocations Policy, a Common Application form and a Common Medical Assessment.
- 3.3** Examples of Best Practice are being used to shape all aspects of the CHR and the review of our own policy.
- 3.4** Representatives from the Council and the RSLs meet on a monthly basis. Sub groups have been established to take forward specific tasks.
- 3.5** To provide a formal framework for a joint operating system, a draft Joint Minute of Agreement has been circulated to all partners for comment.
- 3.6** Access to a shared ICT system is a crucial element of a comprehensive CHR. A representative from the Council's ICT section is a member of the sub group which has been established to investigate the development of a shared system. Support is being provided by the Scottish Housing Best Value Network.
- 3.7** The development of the CHR has been discussed with the Tenants & Residents Organisations and other stakeholder groups, as part of the ongoing consultation in relation to the review of West Dunbartonshire Council's own Allocations Policy. To date, the principles of streamlining access to social housing by way of a CHR have been well received.
- 3.8** A launch date for the CHR has still to be agreed with our partners. A revised Project Plan will be discussed at the next Project Board meeting on 27 August 2009.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** There are no Personnel issues. The development of the CHR is being managed within current resources.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** A funding contribution will be required to develop a shared ICT system. However, no detailed costs are available, as discussions are at an early stage.
- 5.2** A funding contribution will be required for publicity materials and stationery. However, no costs are available, as the live date for the launch of the fully operational CHR has not yet been determined.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The development of the CHR has previously stalled due to difficulties within the partnership. The risk is that if there is not a strong commitment to partnership working by all parties concerned, a similar situation could arise.
- 6.2** Progress in relation to establishing a CHR for West Dunbartonshire is important in developing cohesive services for the communities of West Dunbartonshire regarding facilitating improvements in accessibility to housing across the area. Beyond this given the Council's commitment to transfer a proportion of its housing stock as determined in the Standard Delivery Plan the creation of a CHR will be an important component of supporting access in the future and will aid minimising the risk of fragmented services in the future.
- 6.3** Securing the creation of the CHR has been identified as a key element in the drive for continuous improvement in housing services. Progress in this area is important in respect of the Council's improvement plans and will be assessed through the inspection progress in late 2009. Maintaining the momentum in achieving a successful outcome on this project is therefore critical.

7. Conclusions & Officers' Recommendations

- 7.1** The development of a comprehensive CHR facilitates ease of access to all social rented housing within the area.
- 7.2** Positive partnership working arrangements are in place with the local RSLs.
- 7.3** In tandem with the review of our own Allocations Policy, good progress is being made on the development of a Common Allocations Policy, a Common Application Form and a Common Medical Assessment.
- 7.4** A launch date for the CHR has still to be agreed with our partners. A revised Project Plan will be discussed at the next Project Board meeting on 27 August 2009.
- 7.5** It is recommended that the Committee note the progress to date in the development of a CHR and that a further report outlining the detailed arrangements and commitments for implementation of the CHR be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All