

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

8 OCTOBER 2015

**REPORT OF PEOPLE
SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

Environment and Housing – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Smith

Scrutiny Review of Choice Based Lettings

1. Summary

The attached report outlines the findings of the review of choice based lettings (CBL). The review was undertaken by People Select Committee and considered the marketing and operation of the Tees Valley CBL scheme 'Compass', and the issues facing the local social housing sector.

2. Recommendations

The Committee recommends that:

1. a) that the changes to the bidding process be supported (outlined at 4.32 in main report)
b) that enhanced auto-bidding be rolled out as soon as possible to ensure that those people without internet access are not disadvantaged
2. that the Compass Partnership Steering Group should continually review the website and marketing of the Compass scheme, and in particular:
 - a) to improve the range of information provided with each property advert (for example, floor plans and greater use of photographs)
 - b) to ensure potential applicants are aware of the availability of social housing, and also the ability to 'under-occupy' (subject to housing needs of other applicants and individual financial assessment).
 - c) to ensure the bidding system remains user friendly and in line with customer needs and expectations
3. that Thirteen Group as a key housing partner, continue to work to improve the attractiveness of the social housing offer. This should involve ensuring potential customers are aware of possible packages of support prior to bidding (for example, furniture or decoration incentives)

4. that to continue to ensure an effective and transparent allocations process, the planned assurance work by SBC Housing Services be supported, and that People Committee receives a progress report within six months of the implementation of the new bidding process.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

The report presents the findings of the scrutiny review that took place as part of the agreed work programme for 2015-16.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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8 OCTOBER 2015

**REPORT OF PEOPLE SELECT
COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

SUMMARY

The attached report outlines the findings of the review of choice based lettings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that:

1. a) that the changes to the bidding process be supported (outlined at 4.32 in main report)
b) that enhanced auto-bidding be rolled out as soon as possible to ensure that those people without internet access are not disadvantaged
2. that the Compass Partnership Steering Group should continually review the website and marketing of the Compass scheme, and in particular:
 - a) to improve the range of information provided with each property advert (for example, floor plans and greater use of photographs)
 - b) to ensure potential applicants are aware of the availability of social housing, and also the ability to 'under-occupy' (subject to housing needs of other applicants and individual financial assessment).
 - c) to ensure the bidding system remains user friendly and in line with customer needs and expectations
3. that Thirteen Group as a key housing partner, continue to work to improve the attractiveness of the social housing offer. This should involve ensuring potential customers are aware of possible packages of support prior to bidding (for example, furniture or decoration incentives)
4. that to continue to ensure an effective and transparent allocations process, the planned assurance work by SBC Housing Services be supported, and that People Committee receives a progress report within six months of the implementation of the new bidding process.

DETAIL

1. The attached report outlines the findings of the review of choice based lettings undertaken by People Select Committee. The Committee considered the factors affecting demand for social housing, and the operation of the Tees Valley-wide Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme 'Compass'. Compass consists of all five councils and the major registered housing providers. The Compass Partnership is jointly proposing changes to the bidding system and the Council's views will be fed into this process following Cabinet consideration.
2. The Committee's review has considered both these changes to the bidding system but also the wider marketing of the scheme. The review did not consider changes to the Common Allocations Policy.
3. Following consideration by Cabinet an action plan will be submitted to the Select Committee setting out how approved recommendations will be implemented detailing officers responsible for action and timescales.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4. There are no financial implications at this stage. Minor changes to the operation of the scheme will be met through existing budgets.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5. There are no legal implications at this stage.

RISK ASSESSMENT

5. This review of choice based lettings is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

6. Environment and Housing Theme - Outcome - A clean, green Stockton-on-Tees with appropriate housing provision.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7. This report is not subject to an Equality Impact Assessment because it is making no major change to any policy or service provision.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

8. Changes specifically to the bidding system were consulted on during July-August 2015 via the main Compass website. Thirteen Group's Tenant Scrutiny Panel has also examined the marketing and accessibility of their services, and this was considered by Committee. Representatives of Thirteen Group and Housing Services attended Committee.

9. The Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services, and Cabinet Member for Environment and Housing were consulted on the findings and recommendations.

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Education related? No

Background Paper None

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Property Not applicable