

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

21 JANUARY 2021

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Leader of the Council – Councillor Bob Cook

LOCAL LAND CHARGES REGISTER MIGRATION TO HM LAND REGISTRY

SUMMARY

We are delighted to inform Cabinet that we will be the first North East Local Authority to migrate our Local Land Charges Register to HM Land Registry after working very closely with them on a programme of work which officially started in January 2020. The migration has provided an opportunity to make our processes more efficient, improve the quality of our data and modernise the service so that we can improve the service for our residents and customers.

It is anticipated that HM Land Registry will formally give the Council 4 weeks notice of the transfer on 28 January 2021 with the actual transfer of the Register data going live from the end of February 2021, this represents only a slight delay on our initial target date and is a great achievement bearing in mind the impact of the pandemic.

As a result of the success of the programme the Council has been asked to attend and present at HM Land Registry national conference events together with providing information for a blog which has been added to the HM Land Registry website:

<https://hmlandregistry.blog.gov.uk/2020/11/24/on-track-to-data-migration-how-stockton-rose-to-the-local-land-charges-challenge/>

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

To update Cabinet on the success of the Council's Local Land Charges programme, which will not only support modernisation of the service but also improve the customer experience.

DETAIL

1. Every local authority in England, with the exception of county councils, is required to hold a Local Land Charges Register that records obligations affecting properties within their administrative area. Under the Infrastructure Act 2015, responsibility for the Local Land Charges Registers was transferred to HM Land Registry (HMLR) in a phased approach which began in summer 2018. This is a move to support making the home-buying process simpler, faster and cheaper and help improve the entire conveyancing process.
2. The common obligations protected as local land charges include:
 - planning permissions (these form the majority of charges)

- listed buildings
 - conservation areas
 - tree preservation orders
 - improvement and renovation grants
 - smoke control zone conditions
 - light obstruction notice conditions
 - compulsory purchase orders
3. A local land charge is created by either local authorities or other bodies with the powers to do so, for example , Northumbrian Water and Historic England.
 4. The Local Land Charges Register is held and maintained by Legal Services who also deal with requests for searches of the Register. Other Services are involved in providing information and requesting that local land charges are put on the Register including Environmental Health, Housing, Planning, Highways.
 5. Information for the Register has been held digitally and in paper format. In particular historic planning records are held on index cards which has meant that the Local Land Charges Search service is not as efficient as it could be as a manual search of the planning index cards must be undertaken to complete the search information. In addition Officers have had to collate local land search information for personal search agents rather than agents being able to access Council records themselves.
 6. We carried out a LEAN review of the Land Charges service in 2018 to plan the most effective means of updating the service and to become fully digitalised. Following this work we agreed that we had an approach which would allow us to seek to progress early migration of the Register to HM Land Registry.
 7. As a result the Council successfully requested, in 2019, to be included in the 2020/21 HM Land Registry migration programme and signed a Collaboration Agreement in December 2019. To date only 12 Local Authorities have migrated their Register and we will be the first in the North East to do so.
 8. A significant amount of work has taken place over the last 12 months on data cleansing of the information held on the Register , updating and adding spatial extents to charges, and producing technical solutions and business rules to electronically transfer the data to HM Land Registry. With the support of HM Land Registry over 7,000 planning index cards required for the Register have also been digitalised. We have managed to identify alternative working arrangements that allowed for some of this work to be completed from home and also for Covid-Secure working arrangements to cover the activities that needed to be completed in the offices.
 9. It should be noted that following migration of the Register to HM Land Registry there will still be a requirement for the Local Authority to:
 - Continue to add charges made by the Council to the Local Land Charges Register
 - We will still have to respond to any queries regarding the HM Land Registry responses given to search requests involving Council charges.
 - We will also continue to provide replies to some local enquiries, such as nearby road schemes or outstanding notices, which may affect a purchaser's decision whether to proceed.
 10. Information on the migration programme has been shared on the website <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/our-council/local-land-charges-register-and-searches/> and

directly with regular users of the service including personal search agents. We are confident that the migration will create a better customer experience whilst supporting the Council's approach to digitalisation and access to services.

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