

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday, 14th September, 2015.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell(Chairman), Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Michael Clark (Vice Cllr Lisa Grainge), Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Ben Houchen, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley

Officers: Julie Nixon, Caroline Wood (DNS), Peter Mennear, Jenna McDonald (LDS).

Also in attendance: Julie McNaughton, Sam Cook (Thirteen Group).

Apologies: Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Lisa Grainge

1 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Draft Minutes - 29 June 2015

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2015.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

4 Draft Minutes - 13 July 2015

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2015.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

5 Scrutiny Review of Choice Based Lettings - to consider information from Thirteen Group - to consider the Committee's draft findings and recommendations

Members were provided with a report on the Scrutiny Review of Choice Based Lettings (CBL).

The Committee considered information from Thirteen Group on the refreshed Compass website and Tenant Consultation results, as well as the remaining proposals for change.

The following points were highlighted:

- A target was set by the Government for all local authorities and Registered Providers to introduce CBL by 2010 working in sub-regional partnerships.

- With regard to the allocations approach, Members heard that properties were advertised on a weekly basis and the completion of a large registration form was compulsory.

- The Challenges which the group faced included areas such as; Welfare Reform, increase in the private sector and Demographics.

Information was also provided on the number of bids submitted for three bedroom properties which had shown a decline in recent years, as had the total number of bids being made on the system, reflecting the issues affecting the social housing market.

Members noted that there had been a 13% growth in the last three years in the Private Sector (PS). It was believed that this was due to the PS being responsive to the market, flexible with payments and also offered many incentives.

Compass Group proposed to make the following amendments to the way in which properties were allocated on the allocation scheme:

- Property's would be added to the website any day of the week as opposed to Thursdays only.

- Property's would be advertised for one week or longer if no bids were received.

- Customers would have the option to make unlimited bids for available properties in order to maximise their chances of qualifying for a property.

- Details regarding areas of choice would be taken from customers to enable an auto bid function for any properties not being advertised for a week.

- In specific circumstances, some immediately available properties could be advertised on the system by triggering an auto bid facility.

The Committee was presented with the results from a successful consultation on the proposed changes to the bidding system which received around 600 responses.

The Committee was provided with a demonstration of the Compass website. It was highlighted that when changes were made to the site, all changes were customer based and not back office. There was now improved search facilities. A demonstration of a test application form was also provided.

It was noted that in order to submit an auto bid, it was important for officers to have an understanding of what the customers' needs were.

Members raised the following points/questions:

- Was it possible for an individual to search for available properties if not registered? It was noted that this was possible however; a bid could not be placed if an individual was not registered/logged into the system.

- Was it possible for customers to receive help and support when completing application forms? In response, Members heard that scheduled appointments

and drop in appointments were available to provide this support.

- With regards to the mutual exchange, were customers provided with the opportunity to select options which best met their needs. It was highlighted that the search engine for mutual exchanges was customer defined and operated on a traffic light system in order to indicate how well a property matched the customer.

- Members discussed auto-bidding and who this would be important for people without regular internet access. Auto bidding would only be started once all current customers in reasonable need of housing had been contacted to update their preference details.

It was outlined that sufficient administration resources would be in place to deal with the extra bids that would be generated by the changes, however, following the consultation it was proposed to limit the amount of bids to ten per customer.

- The Committee were keen to know how often a customer was allocated a property without considering preferences and heard that while Compass aimed to advocate choice and preference, this sometimes was not possible as some customers were at a disadvantage due to the amount of time they could dedicate to searching properties.

Members and Officers agreed that the following points should be considered:

- the proposed changes to the bidding system should be supported

- Advertising property floor plans on the Compass website, and other improvements to ensure that the marketing of the scheme followed good practice and modern lettings practice wherever possible.

- A facility on the Compass site which would provide customers with information on what support/incentives could be provided such as white goods, and that further incentives should be considered to attract people into social housing particularly by Thirteen Group, Stockton Borough's main social housing provider.

- Creating awareness that an individual could possibly access a larger property with additional bedrooms, subject to affordability and the housing need of others. There was no blanket ban on smaller households bidding for three bed or larger properties. It was also important to highlight that people not on benefits were able to apply for social housing, and that a greater range of social housing was available than previously due to changes in demand (whilst noting that high demand in some areas was still apparent). A myth busting approach was needed.

- Members agreed that it was important to consider a timely progress report after the new system had been implemented, and supported the monitoring of the correct application of the allocations policy that would be undertaken by housing services. There may also be changes in the housing market and the system would need to be able to respond.

Members queried how the intake of refugees would affect housing provision and officers confirmed they were in discussion with providers however individual family needs were often much wider than just housing.

1. The Committee approve the arrangements for the final report.
2. The information be noted.
3. Suggestions made by Committee Members and Officers be considered.

6 Work Programme 2015-16

Members gave consideration to the Work Programme 2015-16.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

7 Chair's Update

The Chair provided no update.