



## **Internal Audit Report 2015-2016**

### **Housing Register (Homemove)**

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November 2015**

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**Audit:** Housing Register  
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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This audit has been completed as part of the 2015-16 Audit Plan. The council is responsible for carrying out a series of checks on each applicant prior to them being placed on Homemove, the housing register. The Homemove Team will also assess and determine the band rating and undertake reviews (informal and formal) where requested by the applicant.
- 1.2 Homemove is the choice based lettings scheme operated throughout the region and Locata is the system that records all applications and evidence to support them. It also generates the shortlist once the bidding process has closed. The council do not nominate applicants, it is the responsibility of the registered providers to determine allocation of property to the successful bidder.

# 2 Scope

- 2.1 The scope of this audit was as follows:
- To identify and document the processes in place in order for applicants to be placed on the housing register
  - To confirm controls are in place via walkthrough and testing of the procedure
  - Follow up on previous audit report recommendations

# 3 Findings

- 3.1 Although there are no internal procedure documents, the council follows an Allocation Scheme which is a legal requirement and sets out priorities and procedures for the letting of all forms of affordable (social) housing. It is based upon the following key principles:
- Provide a clear and transparent system to prioritise eligible households for social housing.
  - To provide clear information to allow applicants to make informed choices about their housing options.
  - To enable applicants to express choice in seeking their accommodation wherever possible. It should be noted that perpetrators and victims of domestic or other violence may have their choice of area restricted in order to ensure the health and safety of the applicant, their family, if any, and their potential neighbours.

- To meet the requirements of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011.
  - To have regard to the Codes of Guidance issued by the Government and to best practice.
  - To make the best use of social housing in the district ensuring that vacant homes are let quickly and efficiently.
  - To create sustainable communities by giving additional priority to applicants in housing need living in rural parishes and by the use of local lettings plans.
  - To review the Allocation Scheme from time to time to reflect any changes in the law or Government Guidance and to ensure continued improvement.
- 3.2 The Allocation scheme is comprehensive and designed to ensure equality to the applicants. It also highlights those who are not eligible to go on to the housing register.
- 3.3 Application forms can be completed online through the council's website or manually if preferred. In order to be more user friendly, not all fields have to be completed, thus making the verification process more time consuming.
- 3.4 Furthermore, there is no requirement for applicants to provide supporting evidence of income or savings. If this was provided during the application process, it would most certainly save time being spent on requesting such information.
- 3.5 Internal Audit have been informed that because the Locata system is a live, web based system, the shortlists are manually run and printed out, as soon after the the bidding closes. These cannot be re-produced once they are generated. It was agreed that an automated system for producing the shortlist would save an awful lot of time and effort. It was also highlighted that the system was due to go out to tender shortly, and this together with a review of the application forms will be considered then.
- 3.6 Internal processes dicatate that a manual file is opened for all successful applicants, in addition to the electronic copies held on the system. This is so that any sensitive documentation can be held on it and not shared with the Registered providers. Only one of the 25 cases sampled did not have a manual file. This process appears to be a duplication of effort when a simple review of access levels could achieve the same result, by locking down cerain personal details.
- 3.7 One of the application verification checks is against the homelessness database, which is currently held seperatley on Access, this will hopefully be amalgamated into the one system when the Locata contract expires.

- 3.8 If an applicant has not made a bid for a property after a six month period, they are sent a letter asking if they no longer wish to remain on the list. Of the 25 cases sampled only one had not been sent this letter. Internal Audit were informed that a report is run every 6-9 months, however, this person did not appear on the latest report. A member of the housing team will investigate this and undertake appropriate action as necessary.
- 3.9 There are robust review processes in place and a person can request an informal and formal review on any decisions made.



## **4 Conclusion**


- 4.1 In general the application, registration, assessment and bidding process is comprehensive and followed by the council. The system (Locata) has been in place for some years and any enhancements are costly. Therefore the council, together with other members of the Sussex region are looking at going out to tender for a new system. This would give all partners the opportunity to review and make any changes to the application forms/process and the way the electronic data is stored, together with including the homelessness data.

## **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1 An Action Table has been produced, see Appendix 1. In order to prioritise actions required, a traffic light indicator has been used to identify issues raised as follows:
- Red – Significant issues to be addressed
- Amber – Important issues to be addressed
- Green – Minor or no issues to be addressed
- 5.2 Previous recommendations previously made in the 2009-10 report were followed up during this audit and the outcome/responses have been recorded on the Action Table at Appendix 2.

## 6 Action Plan – Appendix 1

Paragraph Ref	Recommendation	Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date
3.3 & 3.4	A review of the application process, including the forms, should be carried out to consider; questions to be completed and the level of evidence required.	Housing Operations Manager	 Important (Amber)	Yes	Agreed that this would be completed and fed into the tendering process currently being undertaken by Brighton and Hove's partnership board project team.	By April, 2017
3.5	The shortlists are currently generated, printed out and held on a manual file. Consideration should be given as to whether this process could be automated.	Housing Operations Manager	 Important (Amber)	Yes	Any changes in Locata are currently outside of the contract and therefore costly. However, it was agreed that this would be a consideration for any future system.	By April, 2017

<b>3.6</b>	The Housing team should review the need to keep duplicate, manual records. Instead access levels should be set up, so that any sensitive or personal details are locked down.	Housing Operations Manager	 Minor (Green)		As above, any changes in Locata are currently outside of the contract and therefore costly. However, it was agreed that this would be a consideration for any future system.	By April, 2017
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## 7 Action Plan (Follow up on Recommendations made in 2009-10) Appendix 2

Recommendation	Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date and Follow up comments
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Recommendation		Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date and Follow up comments
3.5.	That the Homemove – Choice Based Lettings service should introduce a customer satisfaction survey in order to monitor service delivery, and make improvements where highlighted.	Housing Options Manager	Medium	Yes	This work has been planned for, although the loss of the Homemove Officer may make this timescale now difficult to achieve.	By March 2011  <i>Follow up 2015-16. They tried this but had either no response or just complaints from those not eligible to go on the register. Therefore they now rely on the 'right to review' policy, whereby the applicant can request a review on any decision made this starts with an informal one then formal and finally the ombudsman.</i>  Conclusion- accept as satisfactory
3.8.	That staff in the Homemove section sign	Housing Options				<i>Follow up 2015-16. This has now</i>



Recommendation		Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date and Follow up comments
	the revised security policy, which was issued in February 2010.	Manager	High	Yes		<i>been actioned.</i> Conclusion: evidence seen, accept as satisfactory
3.9.	That operational procedures are produced which would aid staff in the event of them being unclear, or when key staff are absent from the office.	Housing Options Manager	Low	Yes		By March 2011  <i>The Allocation Scheme is now used as the operational procedure document and is keep current.</i> Conclusion: accept as satisfactory
3.10	That consideration is given to reviewing the workload of the Homemove team to allow for an increase in the number of home visits.	Housing Options Manager	High	Yes	Home visits are crucial in helping to reduce fraud, but they are time consuming in the light of reductions in staff.	<i>With immediate effect. Home visits are carried out on all A and B bandings with the exception of Multi and Health based</i>

Recommendation		Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date and Follow up comments
						<i>banding decisions which are determined by Carla Geary or Rob Dumnall. Conclusion: accept as satisfactory</i>
3.10.	That consideration is given to PACE training for the Housing Options Team.	Housing Options Manager	Medium	Yes		By March 2011  <i>Staff have a general awareness of PACE but any investigations work which may lead to potential fraud is passed on to the HB Fraud Team. Conclusion: accept as satisfactory</i>
3.11.	That the Housing Options team adopts a risk assessment checklist in order to highlight areas of potential fraud.	Housing Options Manager	Medium	Yes		By March 2011 <i>The Allocation Scheme and the closed register, mitigates the need for a separate risk</i>

Recommendation		Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date and Follow up comments
						<p><i>assessment by process of elimination ie. No local connection, immigration status etc. However, the current app form does allow for questions to be skipped, this will hopefully be addressed in the new system. In addition there is currently no requirement for any financial details to be supplied, ie. bank statements etc this evidence could be requested when the new system is in place.</i></p> <p>Conclusion: a few additional checks/evidence</p>

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Recommendation		Officer	Priority	Agreed?	Comments	Implementation Date and Follow up comments
						accept as satisfactory