

Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **30 November 2015**

Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL

Membership:

Councillors Cathy Kent (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Jan Baker, Clare Baldwin, Sue MacPherson and Tunde Ojetola

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

Substitutes:

Councillors Yash Gupta (MBE), Graham Hamilton, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard and Joycelyn Redsell

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 September 2015.	
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To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **20 November 2015**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;
- Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and
- leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Vision: Thurrock: A place of **opportunity**, **enterprise** and **excellence**, where **individuals**, **communities** and **businesses** flourish.

To achieve our vision, we have identified five strategic priorities:

1. Create a great place for learning and opportunity

- Ensure that every place of learning is rated “Good” or better
- Raise levels of aspiration and attainment so that residents can take advantage of local job opportunities
- Support families to give children the best possible start in life

2. Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity

- Promote Thurrock and encourage inward investment to enable and sustain growth
- Support business and develop the local skilled workforce they require
- Work with partners to secure improved infrastructure and built environment

3. Build pride, responsibility and respect

- Create welcoming, safe, and resilient communities which value fairness
- Work in partnership with communities to help them take responsibility for shaping their quality of life
- Empower residents through choice and independence to improve their health and well-being

4. Improve health and well-being

- Ensure people stay healthy longer, adding years to life and life to years
- Reduce inequalities in health and well-being and safeguard the most vulnerable people with timely intervention and care accessed closer to home
- Enhance quality of life through improved housing, employment and opportunity

5. Promote and protect our clean and green environment

- Enhance access to Thurrock's river frontage, cultural assets and leisure opportunities
- Promote Thurrock's natural environment and biodiversity
- Inspire high quality design and standards in our buildings and public space

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 September 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Cathy Kent (Chair), Clare Baldwin, Sue MacPherson, Tunde Ojetola and Graham Hamilton (substitute for Chris Baker)

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

Apologies: Councillors Chris Baker (Vice Chair) and Jan Baker

In attendance: Councillor Lynn Worrall, Cabinet Member for Housing
Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing
Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing - Investment and Development
Richard Parkin, Head of Housing - Community & Needs
Dawn Shepherd, Strategy Manager, Housing, Business Improvement
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

The Chair thanked Barbara Brownlee for her contributions and hard work to the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee and wished her well in her new role.

10. Minutes

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 17 June 2015, were approved as a correct record.

11. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

12. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Hamilton declared a non-pecuniary interest that he was a Landlord of a property in the borough.

13. Repairs Policy and Service Update

The Director of Housing presented the report which provided the committee a good overview of the repair policy which contained updates on how the principles were set out and how these were being achieved within the first six

months since both the new policy and the contract were implemented in December 2014.

The key highlights the Officer referred to were:

- Repair satisfaction
- Reduction in repairs expenditure
- Increased social value outcomes

The Officer referred and explained to members the Ward Satisfaction Financial Year Comparison diagram.

The Officer explained the geographical spread of damp and mould works across the borough and explained the difference between the requests received and the remedial work identified.

Councillor Hamilton asked the Officer what the trade operative qualifications that were on offer. The Officer explained that there were over 50 different operatives and would report back to the Chair with the information.

Councillor MacPherson asked the Officers if the number of member enquiries had gone down in relation to the work currently being undertaken by the Transforming Homes Programme. The Officer confirmed that a significant number of enquiries were still being received; an approximate figure was down by 50 calls.

The Officer stated that support was available to residents on the cleaning up and how best to deal with damp, mould and condensation.

The Officer also confirmed that the age of apprenticeships currently being offered were for 16-19 year olds and provided pathways into employment but not specific jobs in the council.

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officer how feedback was undertaken from resident satisfaction surveys. The Officer confirmed that the same methodology was used for every survey using a 5 point response from Excellent to Terrible. The repairs service survey contains 20 questions with a 10% sample being analysed.

The Chair asked the co-optee member for their opinion on the Transformation Homes Programme. Lynn Mansfield agreed that the repair times and operatives had improved.

Although Lynn Mansfield disagreed that help was available for the cleaning up of damp, mould and condensation. Only those residents were being advised to open windows and use bleach to remove the mould.

Lynn Mansfield was concerned about the lack of help available for vulnerable people and how they were expected to do more for themselves, which in some cases was not feasible.

The Director of Housing confirmed that Housing will be renewing their IT systems to Northgate by the end of the year. Currently they were using Mears repairs system MCN and Saffron.

Councillor Ojetola asked Officers if asbestos was being covered in the Transformation Homes Programme. The Director of Housing confirmed that a very detailed procedure was followed to address asbestos to comply with all the correct procedures. The Officer will supply details on how many times testing for asbestos had been carried out and how many incidents that had to be dealt with.

The Chair stated that on the whole the repair service had started well and would like to congratulate staff on the progress made so far.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the continued progress was made in the delivery of responsive repairs to Council managed homes.**
- 2. That the ongoing work being done to address the incidence of Damp, Condensation and associated Mould.**
- 3. That the outline and understanding of statutory landlord's requirements on how to deal with asbestos will be provided by the Director of Housing.**

14. Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2010-15

The Director of Housing informed the Members that there was a change to the recommendations in the report. The Board should read "The Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee" and the word approved should now read "to note".

The Officer presented the report which sets out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support were, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who were at risk of becoming so. The local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people were involved in the strategy.

The Officer stated a full consultation plan had been undertaken and that the four main causes of homelessness in Thurrock were:

- Eviction by parents, family or friend
- The ending of an Assured Short hold tenancy
- Violence or harassment
- Mortgage or rent arrears

It was agreed by the Members and Officers that the key area was the homelessness prevention programme.

The Officer informed the Members that London Boroughs were using Thurrock to house their residents and paying very high incentives to landlords.

Councillor Hamilton asked the Officer if reviewing the Action Plan just once a year was a too long a period.

The Director of Housing confirmed that the annual review will be an overview of that year and that the forum will continue to meet in between this period. Those Members interested in attending the forum were to inform the democratic officer for referral to the Officer.

The officer confirmed that the Action Plan was a changing “living” document and this was necessary in order to meet emerging needs

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officer what the plans were for holding the Equalities Impact Assessment. The Officer confirmed that the initial assessment had been carried out and that face to face sessions were being held. A report will be available for Members.

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officers how Thurrock was addressing the economic impact and what the long term plan was. The Officer confirmed that there was a shortage of houses in Thurrock but there were clear plans to build new homes alongside the regeneration plans and Gloriana.

The Director of Housing stated work was undergoing with regard to working with Thurrock landlords, offering them stability, finding them suitable tenants, training and offering support.

Councillor MacPherson asked the Officer why a private landlord would do this when they could get higher rents elsewhere. The Officer agreed but stated that it was a rent payment guarantee for a landlord over a certain period of time.

The Members, the Portfolio for Housing and the Chair congratulated the team on all their hard work and being awarded the Bronze Prize in the National Practitioner Support Service Gold Standard Award.

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officer for Leaving Care Team stats. The Officer will confirm the numbers and inform Members accordingly.

Councillor Hamilton stated that it was good that a bidding war had not started with other local authorities as this could easily get out of hand.

Lynn Mansfield asked the Officers how Thurrock deal with private accommodation homelessness. The Officer confirmed that Thurrock had a duty to assist and follow set legislation that were in place, following the same assessments and priority procedures.

The Director of Housing confirmed that the Action Plan was on track and items for September 2015 were already in place.

Councillor Worrell stated that homelessness was a massive problem and had recently written a report for the Thurrock Gazette on this confirming that until the London Boroughs stop using Thurrock as an overspill the problem will continue to grow.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the Thurrock Homelessness Review 2015 document.**
- 2. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee to note the Thurrock Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2015-20.**
- 3. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee to note an annual review of the Action Plan.**
- 4. That the Director of Housing refer to Cabinet the following:**
 - a) The Equalities Impact Assessments**
 - b) Emphasise the difficulties with retaining Thurrock Landlords**
 - c) Leaving Care Stats regarding failed tenancies**
- 5. That members will supply the democratic officer names of those who would attend the homelessness forum.**
- 6. That the Leaving Care Stats be available to Members.**

15. Elizabeth Gardens - Local Lettings Plan

The Director of Housing informed the Members that the Allocation Policy had a clause which allowed the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee to agree the proposal for a local lettings plan.

The Director of Housing introduced the report which detailed how the local lettings scheme could be used to allow the allocations of two bedroom properties in Elizabeth Gardens, which were outside of the usual requirements where there were no suitable nominees waiting. This would resolve the issue of losing nominations to applicants with no local connection to the borough and ensure that the Councils own waiting list of applicants take priority over the waiting lists of Hanover Housing Association who manage the scheme at Elizabeth Gardens.

All Members agreed to recommend the local lettings plan for a temporary one year period.

Councillor Hamilton asked the Officers if the two bedrooms could be altered to become a one bedroom flat. The Officer confirmed that the Elizabeth Gardens belonged to Hanover so Thurrock were unable to make any alterations to the room sizes.

Councillor MacPherson asked the Officers that after the temporary one year period would residents then have to move out of the two bedroom flats. The Officer confirmed that this would not be the case.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee approved the Local lettings plan for nominations to the two bedroom flats at Elizabeth Gardens for a period of one year.**
- 2. That the local lettings plan allows nomination of the two bedroom properties to applicants outside of the usual bedroom size requirement where there were no waiting applicants who meet the usual criteria.**
- 3. That when the local lettings plan is used to nominate applicants, couples will take priority over single applicants for the two bedroom properties.**

16. Work Programme

Since the publication of the agenda a number of amendments to the work programme had been proposed, which along with the amendments agreed earlier in the meeting, included:

- That an update on the results of the Rent Modelling (1% rent reduction option) be added to the work programme for November 2015.
- That an item on Housing Services Performance Update be moved on the work programme from November 2015 to January 2016.
- That an item on Housing Strategy Action Plan be moved on the work programme from November 2015 to January 2016.
- That an item on Housing Investment Programmes Update be moved on the work programme from November 2015 to February 2016.
- That the item on Update on Right to Move to be removed from the work programme and members supplied with a briefing update at the 6 January 2016 committee.
- That an item on Flexible Tenancies be included on the work programme for November 2015.
- That an item on Homelessness Prevention Strategy be included on the 2016/17 Work Programme for September 2016.

Members were in agreement with the proposed changes to the work programme, following which the Chair requested that an updated work programme be circulated to the Committee and Officers following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted, subject to the amendments detailed above.

The meeting finished at 8.53 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

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30 November 2015	ITEM: 5
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Call-in to Cabinet Decision 01104415 – Housing Estate Regeneration	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal & Democratic Services	
Accountable Head of Service: Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing, Investment and Development	
Accountable Director: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report outlines the call-in made to the above Cabinet decision, highlighting the reasons why the call-in was made and the alternative proposals being put forward.

This report offers advice to the committee on how to manage the call-in through the committee process and should be used as a summary document to help understand the overview of this particular call-in.

1. Recommendation(s)

That Committee can either:

1.1 If it is concerned about the original decision in light of the call-in, refer recommendation 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 (Decision: 01104415, Housing Estate Regeneration) to Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns.

1.2 Reject the call-in stating the reasons why.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 On Wednesday 14 October 2014, Councillors Ojetola, Coxshall and Halden called in the recommendations of the Cabinet report 'Housing Estate Regeneration' (decision 01104415), in their capacity as three non-executive Members.

- 2.2 For information, details of recommendations that have been called in are provided below:

Recommendation 1.1

Cabinet not to award decant status to three Grays high rises – Butler, Davall and Greenwood House, but instead to note that continued consultation should take place with residents to include detailed design on alternative home provision to ensure residents are given a clear unambiguous set of choices.

Recommendation 1.2

Cabinet to agree that officers consider feedback from this consultation as part of the development of the emerging master plan for Grays Town Centre.

Recommendation 1.3

Cabinet to note that the Council's new build development on Seabrooke Rise will be allocated in accordance to the Council's existing Lettings Policy and existing residents of the Seabrooke Rise high rise towers will not benefit from enhanced priority status at the current time, therefore Council explores a local lettings plan as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 1.4

Cabinet to note that the Council is currently reviewing the proposed Housing Development Plan and Estate Regeneration Programme in the light of the Government's imposed reductions in rent. The Council are assessing the implications and options available to ensure that the financial parameters of the HRA are met, whilst retaining an affordable and deliverable programme of housing investment and new build development.

- 2.3 The reason for making the call in (in accordance with Chapter 4, Part 3, Rule 10.4 (f) of the Constitution) has been cited as a failure of the decision maker to take the decision.

- 2.4 The alternative proposal stated on the call in form is:

The flats are not sustainable and do not represent 21st Century Britain, a clear strategy needs to be in place that sets out the flats can be brought up to decent homes standard or if they cannot a viable alternative option, such as demolition. No clear aims/strategy or plan for implementation is currently in place to provide better homes, which should also include the investigation that the flats need to be brought down to provide much better homes for Thurrock residents.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 When considering the call-in, the Committee is recommended to adhere to the following schedule:

- The person who made the call-in to briefly introduce the reasons for the call-in and their alternative proposal(s). (5 Minutes)
- The portfolio holder and officers to respond to the call-in and advise the Committee of any points that may be relevant. (5 Minutes)
- If applicable, the Committee should receive comments from third parties that may be directly involved in the original cabinet decision. (10 Minutes)
- The person who made the call-in to summarise. (5 Minutes)
- The Committee should then weigh up evidence and ask any relevant questions to those in attendance. (5 Minutes)
- The Committee should decide to do one of the following:
 - a) if it is concerned about the original decision in light of the call-in, refer it to the decision maker (Cabinet) for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns; or
 - b) reject the call-in stating the reasons why. (5 Minutes)

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The Committee are requested to manage the call-in in accordance with the provisions set out in Chapter 4, Part 3 of the Constitution.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The call-in has a positive impact on corporate policies as it allows for the proper exercise of the democratic function, namely for Members to call-in a Cabinet decision based on valid arguments.

6.2 The role of Overview and Scrutiny in this function will allow for issues to be discussed in a public arena with cross party involvement and will give the opportunity for interested parties to join the debate and make representations.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Chief Accountant, Corporate Finance

- 7.1.1 The medium to long term financial implications of any project undertaken for housing development or estate regeneration will be, and are considered as, part of both the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the HRA business plan which evaluates both the financial viability and affordability of the schemes incorporating both Capital and Revenue implications with regards to funding and additional revenues generated.
- 7.1.2 Work is ongoing to ensure the viability of the estate regeneration proposals as they are developed within the HRA Business Plan and a further report on the financial implications and the HRA Business Plan will be made to Cabinet in November 2015, including the impact of the government's budget announcements on 8 July 2015.
- 7.1.3 Further reports to Members will be presented on the affordability position of the housing development and regeneration plans on conclusion of the feasibility and affordability studies outlined above. We will also seek approval from Cabinet on the proposed delivery mechanisms and any changes to the required HRA expenditure and business plan as a result of these programmes.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Monitoring Officer

The Call in on this Cabinet decision was submitted within the set time limits under grounds 10.4 (a) (Due regard for individuals and communities served by Thurrock Borough Council); ground 10.4 (g) (Consistent with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework) and following advice the additional ground 10.4 (f) Clarity of aims and desired outcomes.

Following advice from the Monitoring Officer the Chief Executive pursuant to Rule 10.11 deemed the Call in valid under the additional amended ground of 10.4(f) (Clarity of aims and outcomes) but not grounds 10. 4 (a) and (g) as these had not been met.

Ground 10.4 (f) was met and deemed valid as a Call in under this ground could contribute to further clarity of a complex issue and decision.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

Regeneration of the Council's housing estates will have positive impact on the availability of high quality affordable housing in Thurrock, including for vulnerable groups and will be developed through a process of consultation and engagement with all residents and the local community in order to inform a full equality impact assessment prior to any works being commissioned. Regeneration objectives include not only high quality housing but also holistic objectives around health and wellbeing, improving education and job creation and improving economic prosperity. Contractors and developer partners will be required to have relevant policies on equal opportunities, be able to demonstrate commitment to equality and diversity and to supporting local labour initiatives that achieve additional social value.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Call In Form - Cabinet Decision 01104415

Report Author:

Jenny Shade
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Legal & Democratic Services

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Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish

Request to Call-in an Executive Decision

Decision Title: Housing Estate Regeneration (01104415)

Date of Decision: 14/10/2015

Decision Taker: Cabinet
(i.e., Cabinet)

Reason for making the Call-in*:

Requests for Call-in can only be made if there is evidence that the decision maker did not take the decision in accordance with the principles of decision making as set out in the Constitution (Article 13, paragraph 2.1). Please indicate below the principles you believe were not taken into account:

- Due regard for the individuals and communities served by Thurrock Borough Council
- Proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome)
- Due consultation in line with the Council's consultation strategy
- Respect for human rights
- A presumption in favour of openness
- Clarity of aims and desired outcomes (i.e. link between strategy and implementation)
- Consistent with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework

Additional Information to support the Call-in:

The decision maker needs to clarify the aims and desired outcomes for the regeneration of the high rise blocks Butler, Davall and Greenwood House including a plan of implementation. The Council has consulted and majority of residents support the change, therefore there is no need of further consultation. The minutes (attached) state that there is a gap of £6m to bring the flats up to Decent Home Standards. Delaying the eventual demolition is unjust, and is costly for Thurrock tax payers and will not be value for money. This is an expensive decision which will leave a gaping hole in housing finance. Many which would have been better spent on new homes for Thurrock residents.

**Please continue on separate sheet if required.*

The Alternative Proposal is*:

The flats are not sustainable and do not represent 21st Century Britain, a clear strategy needs to be in place that sets out how the flats can be brought to up decent home standard or if they cannot a viable alternative option, such as demolition. No clear aims/strategy or plan for implementation is currently in place to provide better homes, which should also include the investigation that the flats need to be brought down to provide much better homes for Thurrock residents.

**Please continue on separate sheet if required.*

I am/ We are:

- An individual Member whose ward is particularly affected by the decision
- The Chair of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee
- Any two members of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee
- Any three non-executive members of the Council
- A voluntary group with interest in the Thurrock Council area
- A local business situated in the Thurrock Council area **
- 10 Members of the public, working or studying within the Thurrock Council area

*** (except in relation to decisions relating to procurement of goods and services)*

Contact Information:

Name:	Councillor Tunde Ojetola
Daytime Telephone:	07971215640
Email:	tojetola@thurrock.gov.uk
Address:	c/o Thurrock Council

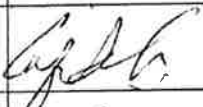
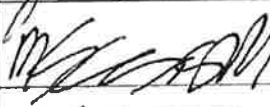
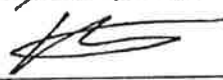
Would you like to make a statement or representation in respect of your call-in when it is considered by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee?

Yes
 No

Date of Call-in request: 16/10/2015

Supporters of the Call-in*:**

*** The table below should be completed to cover each person supporting the call in, as indicated on page 2 of this form.

	Signature	Name (in Block Capitals)	Address (in Block Capitals)
1.		CLLR T O'BRIEN	THURROCK COUNCIL MEMBERS AREA
2.		CLLR M CORSHALL	AS ABOVE
3.		CLLR J HARDER	AS ABOVE
4.			
5.			
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10.			

Please return this form to Democratic Services, Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex RM17 6SL

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30 November 2015	ITEM: 6
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Local Lettings Plan – Seabrooke Rise and Derry Avenue	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Dermot Moloney – Strategic Lead, Housing	
Accountable Head of Service: Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing Investment & Development	
Accountable Director: David Bull, Director of Planning, Transportation & Housing	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

Councils have a statutory duty to publish a scheme which outlines how they will allocate social housing within the borough. The Council may only allocate properties in line with its published scheme; this includes their own properties and those belonging to Registered Providers in the borough where the Council has nomination rights.

Thurrock Councils' current Housing Allocations Scheme was agreed by Cabinet on 14th November 2012 and was subsequently reviewed by Cabinet on 14th January 2015 when a number of minor amendments were approved.

One of the amendments was to allow so called "Local Lettings" plans to be implemented on a case by case basis for new development sites, with Housing Overview and Scrutiny agreement.

The Allocations scheme states:

Thurrock Council may determine local lettings plans for new development sites; the plans would be specific for each development and would be agreed via the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

It is important to note that this and any local lettings plan sits within the Councils agreed allocations policy and therefore for a resident to be considered for transfer they must first satisfy all other elements of the allocations policy - this is further explored in section 2.5.3.

The Council has developed new build properties at Seabrooke Rise in Grays and in Derry Avenue in South Ockendon. Seabrooke Rise is situated within an existing

estate while Derry Avenue consists of street based properties. They are due for completion in January 2016 and November 2015 respectively.

A survey carried out by Ngage with residents on the Seabrooke Rise estate in 2014, indicated that 78% of residents surveyed were in favour of prioritising new build properties for people who already live in the area.

In order to ensure that the balanced communities within the current estates are maintained, a Local lettings plan for the first lets on these sites is recommended. One of the decisions made at October 14 Cabinet on Seabrooke Rise regeneration proposals was that a local lettings plan be developed. In addition to this Derry Avenue is due to be completed this month.

This report outlines

- The properties which the local lettings plan would apply to;
- How new tenants would be prioritised;
- The criteria which new tenants would need to meet in order to qualify for an allocation;
- The process for allocating properties.

1. Recommendation(s)

That Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

- 1.1 Agree to use its powers within Thurrock Council's Housing Allocations Scheme to agree a local lettings plan for the new build properties in Seabrooke Rise and Derry Avenue as outlined within this report;**
- 1.2 Agree that the said local lettings plan allows 75% of first lets to be made to eligible Thurrock Council tenants, who are living within the "applicable boundary" and who are managing their tenancies correctly, as outlined within this report;**
- 1.3 Agree the applicable boundary for the Seabrooke Rise development;**
- 1.4 Determine the applicable boundary to be used for the Derry Avenue development – either ward boundary or road boundary as outlined in this report at 3.8;**
- 1.5 Agree that the remaining 25% of first lets, and any subsequent relets, are allocated in line with Thurrock Council's Housing Allocations scheme and usual allocations processes.**
- 1.6 Agree that where a tenant has been living at more than one property within the applicable boundary, the combined time will count, provided they have lived within the applicable boundary continuously, leading up to their current tenancy.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 A local authority has a statutory duty under s166A of the Housing Act 1996 to provide a scheme which outlines how it will allocate social housing within the borough. The local authority may only allocate properties in line with its allocations scheme; this includes the Council's own properties and those belonging to Registered Providers in the borough where the Council has nomination rights.

Following the Localism Act 2011, local authorities have greater flexibility over how they prioritise the allocation of social housing, subject to offering reasonable preference to certain groups i.e. the homeless, those with medical or welfare needs, those living in unsanitary or overcrowded conditions or those who need to move to a particular area in order to prevent hardship. These are known as the reasonable preference groups.

Allocations schemes must be fair, simple and transparent and they must comply with equality legislation. Community engagement and good partnership working with Registered Providers is essential to achieve this.

- 2.2 The Housing Act 1996 s166A (6) provides that an Allocations Scheme may have provisions regarding the allocation of particular housing to particular groups of people, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference groups. These provisions are more commonly known as "Local Letting plans".

Such plans enable housing authorities to deal with specific issues and concerns – for example

- Creating balanced & mixed communities
- Protecting existing stable communities
- Meeting housing need in rural areas by setting aside a proportion of lets to applicants with local connection
- Restricting where people who have committed serious offences can live
- Reducing void rates & tenancy turnovers
- Improving new community stability
- Tackling low demand properties
- Reducing anti-social behaviour

Local Letting plans must not discriminate against groups of people; it is important to assess any impact before a plan is agreed – for example giving extra priority to local people could discriminate against people moving into or around the borough.

2.3 Thurrock Councils' current Housing Allocations Scheme was agreed by Cabinet on 14th November 2012 and was subsequently reviewed by Cabinet on 14th January 2015 when a number of minor amendments were made.

One of the amendments was to allow local letting plans for new development sites, which would be determined on a case by case basis with the agreement of Housing Overview and Scrutiny committee.

Two new development sites are due for completion and a local lettings plan for each site is sought to enable officers to allocate properties.

2.4 The Properties for which the local lettings plans would apply are as follows:

2.4.1 Seabrooke Rise, Grays, RM17 6FA

The new development is situated on the Seabrooke Rise estate next to the railway line in Grays. It comprises of 53 properties over 4 levels and in three blocks, as follows:

- 13 x 1 bed flats
- 32 x 2 bed flats
- 8 x 3 bed flats

Two properties will be adapted for disabled tenants with specially adapted wet rooms. These properties will be outside of the local lettings plan in order to ensure they are matched to those with a disability and need for adaptations.

The other 51 properties would fall into the local lettings plan and are shown on the list at Appendix 1.

2.4.2 Derry Avenue, South Ockendon, RM15 5FU

The development consists of 25 x one bedroom apartments over 3 levels, each with a small study/dining room.

All properties are built to the HAPPI¹ standard and are designed specifically with older people in mind, with access for personal care and/or support and with flexibility to increase the level of care and/or support within the same home as individual needs change.

One apartment has been already been adapted for the disabled and will be allocated outside of the local lettings plan.

The other 24 properties would fall into the local lettings plan and are shown on the list at Appendix 1.

¹ Housing our Aging Population Panel for Innovation – for more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-our-ageing-population-panel-for-innovation>

2.5 The local lettings plan recommended for the two sites will be as follows:

2.5.1 Applicable properties under the plan:

The plan will include all newly developed properties on the two sites, with the exception of three adapted properties - as outlined in Appendix 1.

2.5.2 How the properties will be allocated:

- 75% of first lettings will be for current Thurrock Council tenants, who meet the criteria in 2.5.3.
- The remaining 25% of first lettings will be allocated via the Councils Housing allocations scheme in line with the usual processes i.e. through Thurrock Choice Homes (TCH)
- A mixture of property sizes and floor levels will be made available for each group.
- Properties will be allocated to households who have a need for the number of bedrooms provided, as determined by the Housing Allocations schemes' bedroom standard.
- These provisions only apply to the first lettings.

	Total new properties on site	Adapted properties outside of local lettings plan	Properties within the local lettings plan	Allocated to current Council tenants 75%	Allocated via TCH 25%
Seabrooke Rise	53	2	51	38	13
Derry Avenue	25	1	24	18	6

2.5.3 Eligibility criteria for current Council tenants for the 75% allocation.

Tenants will only be eligible for the 75% allocation if they meet all of the following Criteria – A, B, C and D.

A. Tenants must hold a current Thurrock Council secure tenancy – introductory and demoted tenants will not be eligible

AND

B. Tenants must meet Thurrock Council's criteria for joining the housing transfer list as laid out in the Housing Allocations scheme:

- Tenants with rent arrears or other outstanding housing related charges (such as re-charges for previous works) will not be eligible
- Where a tenant has breached their tenancy agreement, or has otherwise managed their tenancy in an unacceptable manner, they will not be eligible

AND

C. Tenants must live in a property, rented to them by Thurrock Council, which is situated within the applicable boundary of the scheme as shown in Appendix 1. The applicable boundary for Derry Avenue will be determined by the Housing O& S committee as either:

- Ward boundary - as shown on page 4 of Appendix A
- OR
- Road boundary - as shown on page 5 of Appendix A

AND

D. Tenants must pass a transfer inspection of their current property

AND

E. For Derry Avenue properties only – tenants must meet the Council's criteria for sheltered housing - currently aged 60+ or 55 -59 with a recognised disability or need for adapted accommodation.

Where there would be a joint tenancy and only one tenant meets the age criteria the Allocations team would determine whether or not a joint tenancy could be issued, taking into account factors such as the age difference, disabilities, etc.

Where applicants are downsizing from a larger Council property the current rules regarding downsizing incentives would apply.

2.5.4 Prioritising eligible Council tenants for the 75% allocation.

Tenants who are interested in being considered for the new properties must qualify under the criteria in 2.5.3. An initial list of those interested will be collected by the Allocations team.

Where there are more tenants who qualify than available properties, tenants will be prioritised as follows:

- For Seabrooke Rise properties the basis for priority will not be housing need; instead it will be time lived within the applicable boundary

Where a tenant has been living at more than one property within the applicable boundary, the combined time will count, provided they have lived within the applicable boundary continuously leading up to their current tenancy.

For example:

A tenant, who had lived in property A within the applicable boundary for 10 years and then moved to their current property B within the applicable boundary 5 years ago, will have a combined time of 15 years.

A tenant, who has lived in property C within the applicable boundary for 30 years, and then moved to property D outside of the applicable boundary for 3 years, and then moved back to their current property within the applicable boundary for 2 years, will have a combined time of 2 years.

- For Derry Avenue properties, priority will be awarded according to the level of need for the accommodation.

Derry Avenue properties are specifically designed for older people and for those with disabilities and/or dementia. The properties have bathrooms which are already prepared for easy adaptation should this be required. They are designed to be lifetime homes with the flexibility to support an individual in the same home should their needs change.

On this basis, prioritising applicants would be undertaken by the Extra care panel (consisting of both housing and social care professionals) that would assess each case and determine which has the higher need for the accommodation.

- Where there are insufficient eligible tenants who register an interest in the properties at either scheme, any non-allocated properties within the 75% allocation will be allocated via the usual Thurrock Choice homes allocation process.

2.5.5 Identification of eligible Council tenants for the 75% allocation

Any eligible tenants who are interested in moving to the new sites will be required to join the Council's Housing Transfer list, via the usual online application process. Assistance will be provided where tenants need help with completing the online form but have no one who can help them e.g. family, friends and support workers.

Qualifying tenants will also be required to advise the housing allocations team of their interest, so that a separate register can be administered. This process will be advertised to tenants and advice and assistance provided.

There will be a cut-off date for registering an interest which will be clearly advertised; no further interests can be registered after that date.

The 75% of properties within the local lettings plan will not be advertised via the Thurrock Choice Homes process (newspaper or website adverts). Officers will allocate these after the cut-off date for registering an interest, and tenants will be made a direct offer.

2.5.6 In the interests of fairness, consistency and transparency, details of the local lettings plan for the two sites will be published on the Councils' website and the Thurrock Choice Homes website, if agreed by Housing Overview & Scrutiny committee.

The allocations team will determine which properties are within the 75% quota, and which specific properties are allocated to individual households. Offers made will be on the basis of a one offer only policy – in line with the housing allocations scheme policy (s6.7).

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Local letting plans allow Councils to deal with specific issues affecting specific properties.

When developing a Local Lettings plan the following principals are required:

- A clear definition of the objectives to be achieved
- The method required to achieve the objectives
- An assessment of the equality impact that the plan will have
- How the plan will be monitored and reported
- The views of local communities
- A clear exit strategy for when the plan is no longer required

These principals are outlined below in relation to this specific plan

3.2 A clear definition of the objectives to be achieved:

The objective of the proposed plan is to maintain the balanced and sustainable communities. This is particularly relevant to these sites where the development is part of a rededication of the land, in contrast to a completely new development on previously unbuilt or brown field sites. Inserting new developments with a concentration of properties can destabilise a community and therefore it is important to ensure that a high number of the new tenants are already part of the community.

The resulting void properties where current tenants have transferred will be spread out rather than in a concentrated area and will be available for applicants via the Councils' usual housing allocations process.

3.3 The method required to achieve the objectives:

The proposed local lettings plan requires allocation to a majority quota (75%) who has demonstrated their ability to manage their tenancies in a suitable manner and have a connection with, and active desire to remain within the area

3.4 An assessment of the impact that the plan will have

It is essential that the plan does not discriminate against equality groups and there are current tenants within all of the protected characteristics groups, i.e. elderly, disabled, BME, gender etc.

Adapted properties at Seabrooke Rise will be specifically allocated to disabled people needing those adaptations and the properties at Derry Avenue will be restricted to older people. These provide positive impacts for people meeting these characteristics.

By restricting the new builds to current tenants there is a negative impact on people who wish to move to the area, but this will be mitigated by the resulting void properties within the area following the transfer of current tenants, which will then be allocated via the usual housing allocations process.

3.5 How the plan will be monitored and reported

The local lettings plan will be applicable only to first lettings; therefore no ongoing monitoring of the plan is required.

Notifications of how the first lettings were allocated will be advertised in the usual manner via the Thurrock Choice Homes process in order to ensure transparency; no personal information will be provided.

3.6 The views of local communities

It is important to consult with the local community and an initial survey carried out by Ngage in 2014 on the Seabrooke Rise estate, indicated that 78% of residents surveyed were in favour of prioritising new build properties for people who already live in the area.

3.7 A clear exit strategy for when the plan is no longer required

Since this local lettings plan only applies to first lets it will have a restricted life span and will no longer apply once the first lettings are completed.

3.8 Options for the applicable boundary for Derry Avenue properties

Members are presented with two options for determining the applicable boundary for the Derry Avenue properties:

- Ward boundary – shown on page 4 of Appendix 1

This allows a broad area covering the whole of the Ockendon ward but cuts out some roads within walking distance of the scheme.

- Road boundary – shown on page 5 of Appendix 1

This is a more restrictive boundary allowing priority to people living within a reasonable walking distance (up to 15 minutes) of the properties

For either option it will be important to ensure that a boundary does not cut a road in half so that adjacent neighbours have different priorities. If this were the case then exceptions for logical geographic boundaries would need to be employed on a case by case basis. Where the road boundary option is applied this is less likely since the boundaries would be divided by main roads i.e. M25, Stifford Road, Avontar Road, Tamarisk Road and South Road.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The Council has embarked on a house building and regeneration programme, which will introduce both infill sites and brand new developments, some on sites previously unused for housing.

4.2 It is essential that balanced and sustainable communities are quickly achieved within these new developments, through both existing and new Council tenants.

4.3 Where a site is being in filled a large influx of new tenants in the middle of current communities could have a de-stabling effect. It is prudent to move current tenants into new developments and then back fill their properties in order to avoid this. Overall there is a still an increase in properties available.

4.4 The use of a local lettings plan clearly identifies how this can be achieved and ensures there is transparency, fairness and consistency in implementing the objective.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 In 2014 Ngage undertook a survey of residents on the Seabrooke Rise estate. The survey took place over a period of 7 weeks between 20 January and 7 March 2014.

- 5.2 Residents were able to complete the survey on-line but to ensure maximum feedback, the estate was also visited weekly and where unable to obtain a reply, a card was left at each property and revisited up to 4 times.
- 5.3 The survey achieved a response of 60% which represents 387 households of 661 properties on the estate.
- 5.4 78% of those surveyed were in favour of prioritising new build properties for people who already live in the area.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The proposed plan will enable the Council to build pride, responsibility and respect within the borough by promoting sustainable and balanced communities
- 6.2 Tenants who are living in such communities will benefit from improved health and well-being, since settled housing promotes these benefits.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Financial Accountant, Corporate Finance

Allocating new properties to existing council tenants will result in an increased number of void properties and the associated costs e.g. void assessment, gas checks, remedial works, advertising costs etc.

Extra voids will also result in increased rent loss during the void turnaround period, although this can be mitigated to some extent through early identification of transferring tenants and subsequent early identification of works required to minimise void periods.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**
Housing Solicitor & Team Leader

The Housing Act 1996 s166A (6) allows a local authority to implement provisions within its Housing allocations scheme regarding the allocation of particular housing to particular groups of people, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference groups.

Thurrock's current housing allocations scheme as amended in January 2015 provides for such schemes to be used on a case by case basis in agreement with Members of the Housing overview & Scrutiny panel.

On the basis that the number of lettings to be included in the Local Lettings Plan is a relatively small proportion of the entire annual lettings, there are no issues with the proposals.

There do not appear to be any legal implications of subsequent lets going through the usual CBL scheme, which would appear to be the easiest and fairest way to administer future lettings.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development & equalities
Manager

Thurrock's current Housing allocations scheme allocates 75% of properties to applicants who are prioritised by their housing need. 25% are given to current Council tenants with a desire rather than a need, to move.

The Local lettings provision alternates this position and favours Council tenants over non Council tenants for new Council housing developments.

The justification for this is to ensure that the initial new communities that result will be sustainable. There is a greater probability of this being achieved where the majority of tenants have already proven the ability to manage their tenancies well and have an active connection with the area.

There is a provision within the scheme to allow specially adapted properties to be allocated only to those with a disability, regardless of their current tenure.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 - Properties included in the local lettings plan and maps outlining the applicable boundaries

Report Author:

Dawn Shepherd

Strategy Manager, Housing

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APPENDIX 1 – Local lettings Plan: Seabrooke Rise and Derry Avenue

Seabrooke Rise

Properties included in the Local lettings plan:

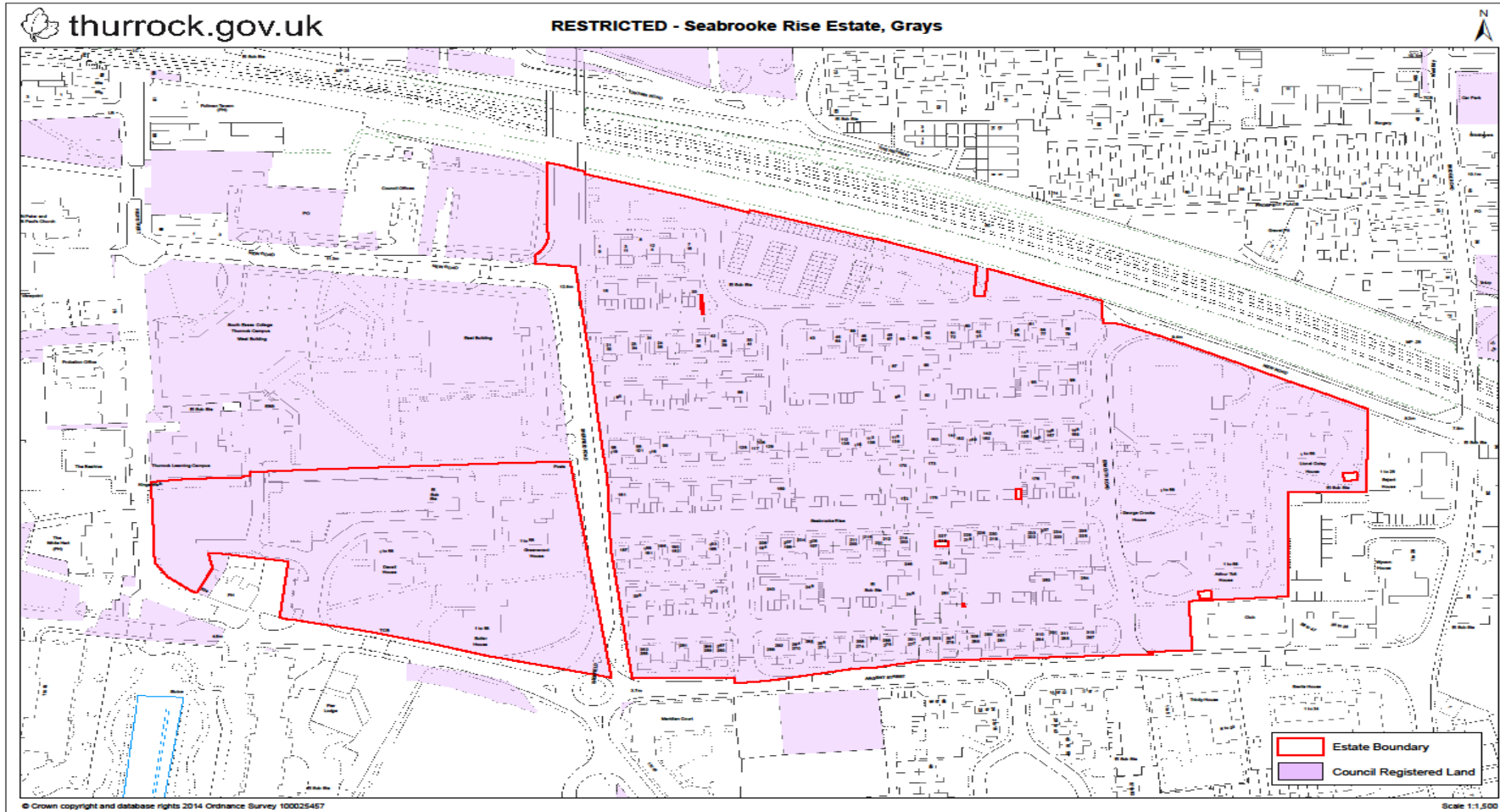
Block Number	Block	Floor level	Bedrooms
2	Block A	Ground floor	1
3	Block A	1st floor	3
4	Block A	1st floor	1
5	Block A	1st floor	2
6	Block A	2nd floor	3
7	Block A	2nd floor	1
8	Block A	2nd floor	2
9	Block A	3rd floor	3
10	Block A	3rd floor	1
11	Block A	3rd floor	3
12	Block A	4th floor	3
13	Block A	4th floor	2
14	Block B	Ground floor	2
15	Block B	Ground floor	2
16	Block B	1st floor	2
17	Block B	1st floor	1
18	Block B	1st floor	2

Block Number	Block	Floor level	Bedrooms
19	Block B	2nd floor	2
20	Block B	2nd floor	1
21	Block B	2nd floor	2
22	Block B	3rd floor	2
23	Block B	3rd floor	3
24	Block B	3rd floor	2
25	Block B	Ground floor	2
26	Block B	1st floor	2
27	Block B	1st floor	1
28	Block B	1st floor	2
29	Block B	2nd floor	2
30	Block B	2nd floor	1
31	Block B	2nd floor	2
32	Block C	Ground floor	2
33	Block C	Ground floor	2
34	Block C	1st floor	2
35	Block C	1st floor	1

Block Number	Block	Floor level	Bedrooms
36	Block C	1st floor	2
37	Block C	2nd floor	2
38	Block C	2nd floor	1
39	Block C	2nd floor	2
40	Block C	3rd floor	2
41	Block C	3rd floor	2
42	Block C	3rd floor	2
43	Block C	Ground floor	2
45	Block C	1st floor	2
46	Block C	1st floor	1
47	Block C	1st floor	3
48	Block C	2nd floor	2
49	Block C	2nd floor	1
50	Block C	2nd floor	3
51	Block C	3rd floor	2
52	Block C	3rd floor	1
53	Block C	3rd floor	2

Map of the applicable Seabrooke Rise estate

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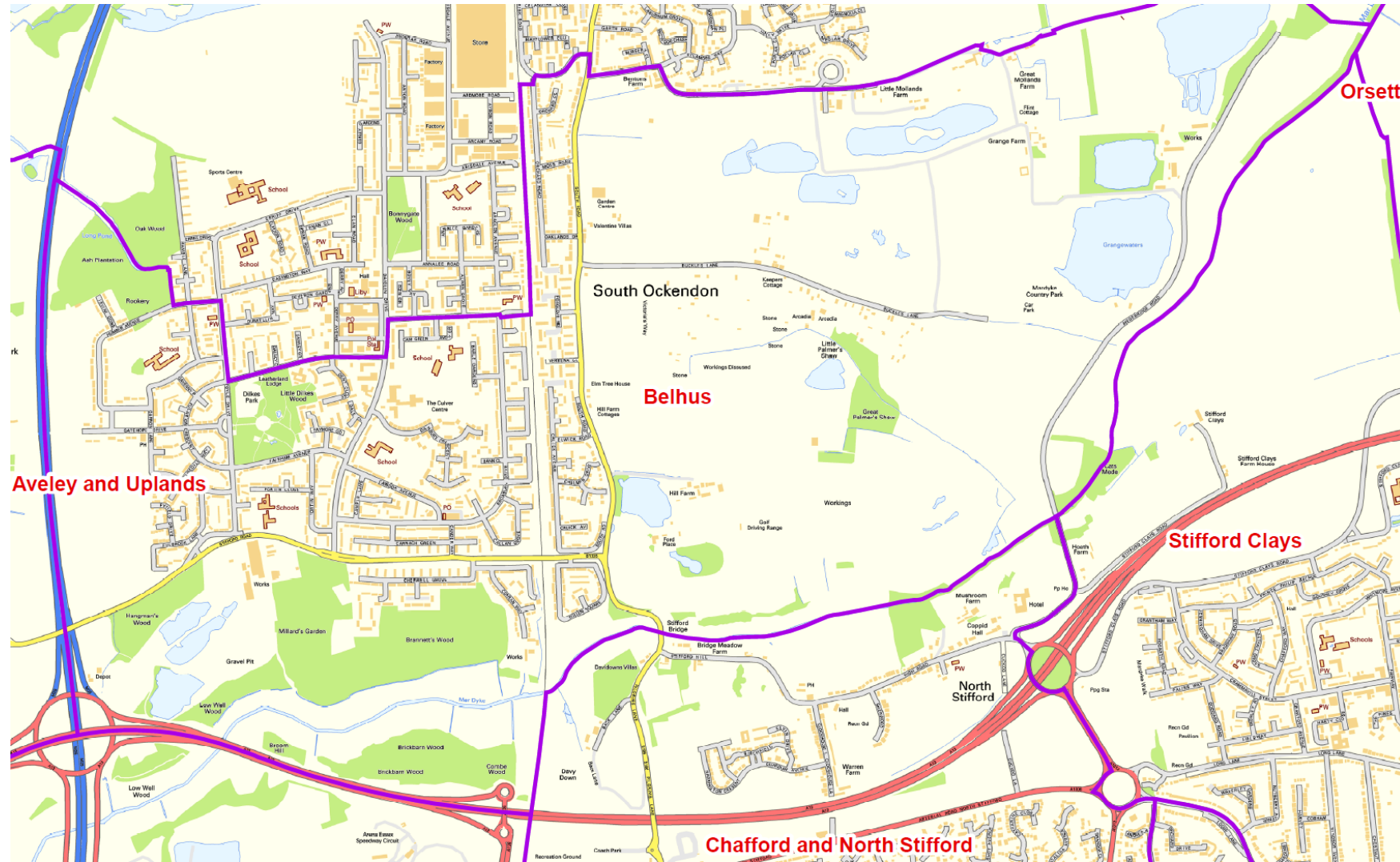


Derry Avenue

Properties included in the Local lettings plan:

Block Number	Block	Floor level	Bedrooms
1	Block A	Ground floor	1
3	Block C	Ground floor	1
4	Block C	Ground floor	1
5	Block C	Ground floor	1
6	Block C	Ground floor	1
7	Block A	1st floor	1
8	Block A	1st floor	1
9	Block B	1st floor	1
10	Block B	1st floor	1
11	Block C	1st floor	1
12	Block C	1st floor	1
13	Block C	1st floor	1
14	Block C	1st floor	1
15	Block A	2nd floor	1
16	Block A	2nd floor	1
17	Block B	2nd floor	1
18	Block B	2nd floor	1
19	Block C	2nd floor	1
20	Block C	2nd floor	1
21	Block C	2nd floor	1
22	Block C	2nd floor	1
23	Block A	3rd floor	1
24	Block B	3rd floor	1
25	Block B	3rd floor	1

Map of Belhus ward



30 November 2015		ITEM: 7
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Implications Welfare Reform Bill 2015 on HRA Business Plan		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing Investment and Development and Corporate Commercial Services		
Accountable Head of Service: Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing Investment and Development and Corporate Commercial Services		
Accountable Director: David Bull, Director of Planning and Transportation		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

On 8 July 2015, the Chancellor of the Exchequer made budget announcements to introduce key policy changes that will have financial implications on the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. These have now been formalised in two bills the Housing and Planning Bill and Welfare Reform Bill 2015. The estimated impact of these proposals will require a fundamental review and appraisal of the Council's approved and continuing housing investment programmes to ensure that the Council is able to deliver and maintain a balanced HRA.

The current estimated cumulative impact of the Government's proposals has the potential to make the Council's current HRA business plan unviable. However at this stage, we have focussed on making recommendations that would mitigate the financial impact of the most mature of these proposals, the 1% reduction in rents for four years from 1st April 2016. This alone has an estimated impact of taking £14.6m out of the business plan from 2016/17 to 2019/20, and £218m over the 30-year life of the business plan.

At Cabinet on 11 November 2015 a number a range of principles for addressing the estimated gap likely to be created should these proposals in the above bills be agreed.

1. Approve that an application to the Secretary of State to issue an exemption to allow much needed current affordable Housing to be delivered.
2. Recommend rent settings for new HRA dwellings at "affordable rents" i.e. up to 80% of market rents.

3. Recommend the revision to the Transforming Homes programme and where the asset supports it and extending the delivery of the programme beyond 17/18.
4. Note that the housing department will seek to achieve revenue cost savings and efficiencies equating to £500k per annum or £2m over the four-year period. This will be achieved through a combination of cost savings and increased funding and grant opportunities for existing development.

This paper presents to Housing Overview and Scrutiny, the impact that these recommendations will have on our existing housing investment and delivery programmes and what the changes will mean for local residents. Importantly, it also ensures that we continue to work on meeting our current and future housing needs within the borough.

In order to ensure that the HRA remains financially viable following the proposed legislative changes set out in the Governments budget statement, detailed work has been undertaken on the options available to bridge the financial gap resulting from the 1% reduction in rents. In summary, an extension to the completion of the transforming homes programme and reductions in operational expenditure result in additional resources of £7.6m in the next five financial years. In addition, a move to setting rents on new build properties at 70% of market value will generate a further c£1.4m over the same period. These proposals coupled with a reduction in the affordable housing programme of c 20 homes by the removal of Argent Street from the programme mitigates the impacts of the rental proposals by c12.5M. Should the application for an exemption for the need to apply the full 1% in Thurrock not be granted by the Secretary of State further reductions in our current affordable home building programme may need to take place.

1. Recommendation(s)

That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

- 1.1 Note the application to the Secretary of State for an exemption to the 1% reduction, or part thereof, to allow the continuation of our current, mature and much needed affordable Housing programme.**
- 1.2 Agree the setting affordable rents for Seabrooke Rise and Derry Avenue as at 70% of market rent, to support the continuation of the current HRA affordable homes programme.**
- 1.3 Agree the proposed revisions to the current published timetable for the Transforming Homes programme, extending internal improvements by up to 1year (1,000 homes) and external improvements by up to 3 years(5,000 homes), where the asset supports delayed completion.**
- 1.4 Note that a HRA revenue cost savings and efficiencies plan equating to £500k per annum or £2m over the four-year period from 1st April 2016 will be delivered to support the continuation of the HRA affordable homes programme**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Government's key policy changes announced on the 8 July 2015, these are now formalised in Housing and Planning and Welfare Reform Bills 2015, the key issues that will impact on our HRA business plan as follows:
- a) 1% reduction in social rents for four years from the 1st April 2016;
 - b) "Pay to stay" proposals from 2017/18; and
 - c) A requirement for local authorities to finance the cost of the expansion of the Right to Buy and associated discount to tenants in Housing Association Homes.
- 2.2 The 1% reduction in rents is the most developed of all the above announcements. This alone has an estimated impact of taking £14.6m out of the business plan from 2016/17 to 2019/20, and £218m over the 30-year life of the business plan. Further information is required to model the financial implications on the HRA of the other two announcements. These will, however, make our HRA business plan unviable.
- 2.3 The Council has an ambitious programme to improve the quality of Council owned homes within the borough to a high standard that supports the long-term viability of the asset and to build new affordable homes for current and future generations. With our investment programmes well underway, the Council does not have significant surpluses in which to absorb the impact of more major changes in central Government policy, unlike many registered providers within our sector. These changes, therefore, requires changes to our existing housing investment and development programmes in order to deliver a balanced HRA.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Social housing rents are currently set according to the Government's rent policy guidance. The current rent guidance was published in May 2014 (with effect from April 2015) and expected annual rent increases to CPI +1% for the next 10 years. This was the assumption applied within the HRA 30-year business plan. The 8th July 2015 budget announcement effectively suspends the current social rent policy guidance and instead of on-going rent increases of CPI +1%, the Council is now required to reduce rents by 1% from current levels (with a base date of 8th July 2015) i.e. the rent for a dwelling in 2016/17 should be 1% less than the rent as at 8th July 2015 and the rent in subsequent years should be 1% less than the previous year. The treatment of service charges is unaffected by the announcements.
- 3.2 The 1% rent reduction results in a £14.6m shortfall over the 4 years from 2016/17 to 2019/20 and a £218m shortfall over the 30 year period. This is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1 - Cumulative Shortfall by Year £m

	Pre Budget £m	Post Budget £m	Loss of income £m	Cumulative Loss of Income £m
2015/16	47.539	47.539	0	0
2016/17	47.793	46.891	0.902	0.902
2017/18	48.999	46.297	2.701	3.603
2018/19	50.234	45.714	4.52	8.123
2019/20	52.489	46.009	6.48	14.603

Table 1a - Cumulative Benefit to Tenants by Year

	Average Weekly Rent (Previous Projection)	Average Weekly Rent (based on - 1% proposals)	Average weekly impact to tenants not in receipt of benefits	Average yearly impact to tenants not in receipt of benefits
2015/16	87.34	N/A		
2016/17	88.21	86.47	1.74	90
2017/18	89.1	85.61	3.49	181
2018/19	89.99	84.75	5.24	272
2019/20	90.89	83.9	6.99	363

- 3.3 It is undoubtedly the case that some residents will have a direct benefit from these proposals – this is shown in Table 1a above. However on balance the gains by some residents have impacts on others – through delays that will now be required in published investment programme, reduction in number of affordable homes and increases in previously projected rent levels for delivered through a HRA supported affordable house building programme. This is primarily because in Thurrock there is no scope for the HRA to undertake additional borrowing to mitigate this. Under the capital finance regulation these have already been maximised to facilitate our existing housing development and investment programmes. In addition, previous projected balances were full accounted for to support the delivering of much needed additional affordable homes and to increase the quality of existing homes. Hence, the difference in balances will require a real change to the Council current programmes and the Council’s rent policy for new dwellings that were previously agreed to address local need. In addition, the need to apply to the Secretary of State for an exemption.

Secretary of State Exemption

- 3.4 Cabinet on 11 November approved the development of an application for an exemption. The estimated cumulative impact of all the current proposals will not only substantially reduce the council's ability to contribute to the provision of much needed affordable homes locally, but over the medium term the initial assessments of the cumulative impact of all of these proposals has the potential to make the HRA business plan unviable. A full detailed impact assessment is therefore underway to support the basis of an application for an exemption.

Letting all new HRA dwellings at "affordable rents"

- 3.5 There is an opportunity for the HRA to generate additional income through the charging of "affordable rents" for all new HRA dwellings being delivered through the Council's affordable housing programme.
- 3.6 An estimated 400 new homes are currently scheduled to be delivered over the next five years. The anticipated delivery of new HRA homes is illustrated in the table below. The current HRA business plan assumes that all new HRA homes that are delivered within the programme are let at social rent levels. If the Council were to adopt a policy to let all new HRA homes at "affordable rent" levels then the HRA could generate more income on an annual basis on some schemes. Affordable rents are defined as rents up to 80% of market rent levels. Table 2 below shows the estimated overall projected annual impact of different setting rents at the different levels for all new homes.

Table 2 - Programme of New HRA Homes

Rent Level	Annual Rental Income £pa	Difference £pa
Social rent	£1,773,498	
Affordable – 60% of market	£2,127,564	£354,066
Affordable – 70% of market	£2,482,158	£708,660
Affordable – 80% of market	£2,836,752	£1,063,254

- 3.7 Tables 3, 3.1 and 3.2 below illustrate the difference of the impact at a more local level, using the locations from the current affordable house building programme supported by the HRA. The tables show the impact by location of setting "affordable level" at 80%, 70% or 60% of market rents and compares this with the estimated average increase in monthly rent payments for each of the different rent levels.

Table 3 - Affordable rent 80% vs Social rent

Rent Level	Potential Social Rent	Affordable Rent (80%)	Difference in Monthly Rent	Number of Properties	Difference in Rental Income
	£ per week	£ per week			
Grays	£107.77	£173.72	£263.80	83	£286,006
Corringham & Stanford Le Hope	£130.39	£237.60	£428.83	12	£67,219
South Ockendon	£125.22	£168.37	£172.61	42	£94,696
Tilbury	£122.92	£157.48	£138.25	37	£66,819
Chadwell St Mary	£123.66	£147.14	£93.91	54	£66,241
Purfleet	£92.64	£172.80	£320.64	75	£314,128

Figure 3.1 – Affordable Rent 70% Vs Social Rent

Rent Level	Potential Social Rent	Affordable Rent (70%)	Difference in Monthly Rent	Number of Properties	Difference in Rental Income
	£ per week	£ per week			
Grays	£107.77	£152.01	£176.96	83	£191,855
Corringham & Stanford Le Hope	£130.39	£207.90	£310.03	12	£48,597
South Ockendon	£125.22	£147.32	£88.41	42	£48,502
Tilbury	£122.92	£137.80	£59.53	37	£28,773
Chadwell St Mary	£123.66	£128.75	£20.35	54	£14,353
Purfleet	£92.64	£151.20	£234.24	75	£229,483

Figure 3.2 – Affordable Rent 60% Vs Social Rent

Rent Level	Potential Social Rent	Affordable Rent (60%)	Difference in Monthly Rent	Number of Properties	Difference in Rental Income
	£ per week	£ per week			
Grays	£107.77	£130.29	£90.08	83	£97,661
Corringham & Stanford Le Hope	£130.39	£178.20	£191.23	12	£29,975
South Ockendon	£125.22	£126.28	£4.25	42	£2,330
Tilbury	£122.92	£118.11	N/A	37	N/A
Chadwell St Mary	£123.66	£110.36	N/A	54	N/A
Purfleet	£92.64	£129.60	£147.84	75	£144,838

3.8 Implementation of different affordable rent levels to those previously planned will now mean that local residents, will pay significantly different weekly rents for new HRA properties compared to existing HRA homes let at social rent levels, in order to protect our ability to build as many affordable homes as possible, with the reduced funding likely to be created by the rental reduction proposals. The properties would be new, high quality homes and so some level of enhancement could be anticipated.

Seabrooke Rise – The Echoes

3.9 It is important to note that actual social rents payable in new build homes as set out below are higher than those payable on existing homes. Therefore table 4 below compares the different that would be payable at various affordable rent levels. Whilst Table 4a provides an estimated figure for the rest of the current approved new build programme that is either at planning or construction phase.

Table 4 - The Echoes weekly Rents: Social Vs Affordable

Seabrooke Rise, & Grays High Rises	Current Social	Potential New Social for Echoes	Affordable Rent Average		
	Rent Average	Rent Average	80%	70%	60%
Bedsit	£63.03	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1 bedroom high rise	£66.72	£85.04	£123.88	£108.39	N/A
2 bedroom	None	£95.79	£164.03	£143.53	£123.02
2 bedroom high rise	£75.20	£95.79	£164.03	£143.53	£123.02
3 bedroom	£87.58	£106.49	£190.98	£167.11	£143.24
Average	£87.26	£94.57	£159.63	£139.68	£119.72

3.10 Table 4a below shows the comparison of previous estimated social rent levels against the possible range of possible affordable rent levels for the schemes either on site of with impending planning permission. This report proposed that rent levels for new homes by the HRA are set at 70% of market. This provides a balance between mitigating the impact of funding reduction likely to be necessary and the different in rent levels across the HRA.

Table 4a – Projected Weekly rental for affordable house programme

Scheme	Potential Social Rent	Affordable Rent			% Diff 80	% Diff 70	% Diff 60
		80%	70%	60%			
Bracelet Close, Corringham	£130.39	£237.60	£207.90	£178.20	82%	59%	37%
Derry Ave, S. Ockendon	£125.22	£168.37	£147.32	£126.28	34%	18%	1%
Calcutta Road, Tilbury	£122.92	£157.48	£137.80	£118.11	28%	12%	N/A
Claudian Way, Chadwell	£123.66	£147.32	£126.28	£110.36	19%	2%	N/A
Tops Club, Grays	£107.77	£173.72	£152.01	£130.29	61%	41%	21%

Amendments to the Transforming Homes Programme

- 3.11 In 2013, Cabinet agreed to increase the annual major repairs allowance for housing to £13.6m per annum over five years to improve all Council owned homes to the new standard. This set aside £68m of much needed investment to deliver improvements in our existing HRA council housing stock to quality standards beyond the Government's own Decent Homes Standard. This was our Transforming Homes programme that commenced in FY2013/14 and was due to be completed on FY2018/19. The Transforming Homes programme is in its third year and 50% of all new Council homes have been completed.
- 3.12 As a direct result of the estimated reduction in income that will result from proposed changes in both bills, there is a need to revise the programme. Our recommendation is to extend the Transforming Homes programme to five and a half years for internal improvements and eight years for external improvements. This will reduce annual expenditure in the immediate period when the impact of the rent reductions most impact the HRA and when expenditure on other mature programmes of housing investment are at their peak. The changes are illustrated in Table 5 below.

Table 5 - Transforming Homes Programme of Expenditure

Year	Current TH Programme	Revised TH Programme	Difference
2015/16	£13.6m	£13.6m	-
2016/17	£13.6m	£12.9m	-£0.7m
2017/18	£13.6m	£10.4m	-£3.2m
2018/19	£11.6m	£7.9m	-£3.5m
2019/20	N/A	£8m	£8m
2020/21	N/A	£5.6m	£5.6m

- 3.13 These changes result in a net decrease of £3.9m between now and the financial year 2017/18 as per the originally outlined programme, but overall lead to a net increase of £4.0m in expenditure due to lost efficiencies as a result of programming the internal and external works to the properties in different years. This also means that the resident will experience two visits to complete all the necessary works required to achieve the Transforming Homes Standard, rather than a single visit that has been achieved thus far.
- 3.14 The proposed revisions of the Transforming homes programme will result in a delay of up to one year for the delivery of internal improvements for up to one Thousand tenants and a delay of up to three years for the delivery of

external improvements for up to 5,000 tenants and leaseholders, against the original published programme.

Cost Savings within the HRA

- 3.15 The housing department previously achieved cost savings and service efficiencies that delivered £12.883m of savings from 2010/11 to 2015/16. The savings were delivered through a combination of management and operational savings including improved procurement and outsourcing of more efficient and effective third party contracts and revisions in key housing policies such as the Repairs Policy that reduced the scope of delivery to that more in line with neighbouring authorities.
- 3.16 We have now identified the opportunity to deliver further revenue cost savings and efficiencies of £500k per annum over the four-year period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2021 or £2m in total. This also includes opportunity for additional sources of funding and increased grant to support programmed development activity.
- 3.17 The target of £2m reduction in revenue expenditure from the HRA will be delivered via a four year savings plan that will build on existing actions that have been taken to realise efficiencies over the last three years. These will include further opportunities for increases income, reductions in consultancy spend as a result of contraction of investment programmes, reductions in service delivery costs through reshaping and restructuring and a reduction in third party spend.

Affordable Housing Programme

- 3.18 The planned programme of housing development being delivered by the HRA under the Affordable Housing Programme is the other area where revisions in the programme are able to achieve cost savings to help in mitigating the impact of reduced revenue as a result of the 1% reduction in rents. Radical changes in our programme would impact on our credibility with HCA and DCLG and also mean that we would lose already secured grant funding and/or additional borrowing capacity. Where, for whatever reason, we have not commenced the development, there is an opportunity to delay commencement or to remove the scheme from our plans.
- 3.19 We are proposing the removal of the Argent Street development site from the Affordable Housing Programme. The site is adjacent and of significant interest to the Rippleside Metal Works site and the proposed Riverside Homes development. Although the proposed Riverside Homes development is subject to further development and an approved planning application, a residential development for the entirety of this site (Council site plus Rippleside Metal Works site) would be the Council's preference given the benefit to the wider regeneration of South Grays and Grays beach. Given the Council site was only anticipating the delivery of c.20 units, removal of this site would have minimal impact on our Affordable Housing Programme and provide the opportunity to sell the site to Riverside Homes to see a high

quality residential development on the larger, prominent development site within South Grays.

- 3.20 It will be important, however, for the Council to see the requisite proportion of affordable homes delivered as part of any development proposed for this site.
- 3.21 Implementation of the “Pay to Stay” and potential disposal of our “high value voids” will have further implications on the HRA that would need to be addressed separately.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 Quality housing provision and choice in areas that people live are central to us achieving our vision for Thurrock. It is important that we maintain, wherever possible, the existing Housing Investment and Development programmes that are specifically driving the quality of the HRA housing asset base and delivering new, high quality affordable homes across the borough.
- 4.2 The Transforming Homes and Housing Development programmes are mature, well into their delivery and delivered significant improvements in quality, the number of new affordable homes and improved resident satisfaction.
- 4.3 The Local Government Act 1989 places a duty on the Council to prevent a debit balance on its HRA and, therefore, a revised HRA business plan that delivers a balanced account is of critical importance and the core strategic objective of the Council. Therefore some revisions to existing programmes of investment and expenditure are unavoidable as the Council and the HRA does not generate the level of surpluses required to absorb the impact of the Government’s proposed changes.
- 4.4 The impact assessment undertaken by government has not been done with sufficient nuance for the differing implications of the changes to be fully understood. The assessment is limited to housing associations with large surpluses. However our business plan has maximised and extended currently borrowing capacity and has a mature affordable house building programme designed to address local need. In Thurrock there is a significant affordable housing need that will not be met by the private sector despite 5,000 approvals for new homes. The assessed existing local need in the borough is noted stands at over 500 a year. It is recommended that Cabinet approve an application to the Secretary of State for an exemption, based on the impact as currently assessed, to the Council affordable housing programme, supported by clear need for such housing which at this stage is not projected to be met by the private development alone.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Specific impact assessment and implications on different tenants is scheduled to be including in a report to Housing Overview and Scrutiny in November 15. This will allow scrutiny of the implications of the principles being agreed prior to a further paper to cabinet in December.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Government's proposals and our ability to deliver the current housing investment and development plans will impact on our ability to deliver improvements to our HRA homes and deliver new homes within the original timescales outlined. This will undoubtedly impact on residents' perceptions and satisfaction with our delivery. It may also slow the delivery of related and broader regeneration activities planned by the Council.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: Mike Jones
Management Accountant

The medium to long term financial implications of the announcements have been considered insofar as possible at the current time with further details and clarification of the implementation of the proposals still required. The affordability and deliverability of the current programmes have been considered and reviewed to ensure that the recommendations deliver a balanced HRA.

In summary, an extension to the completion of the transforming homes programme and reductions in operational expenditure result in additional resources of £7m in the next five financial years. In addition, a move to setting rents on new build properties at 70% of market value will generate a further £1.428m over the same period. In total, this equates to £8.428m in order address, in part, the £14.6m reduction in rental income over the next 4 years. We are also reviewing the opportunity to delay or remove some of the existing affordable housing developments that are currently planned e.g. Argent Street, to deliver the additional savings required to address the financial gap and deliver our statutory obligation of delivering a balanced HRA.

Work is ongoing to ensure HRA business plan is affordable and deliverable with the additional financial constraints imposed by the most recent Government announcements and further recommendations with be forthcoming at the appropriate time to ensure a balanced HRA is deliverable as a result of the "Pay to Stay" and "Disposal of High Value Voids".

We are content at this current time that progress has been made in addressing the financial gap posed by the 1% rent reduction and that this work is ongoing and subject to further recommendations to ensure a balanced HRA is delivered.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: Martin Hall
Housing Solicitor/Team Leader

There are no specific legal implications of the recommendations contained within this update report.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: Rebecca Price
Community Development Officer

The Council's reduced ability to deliver previously agreed and widely publicised Transforming Homes programme, planned housing development and other housing investment spend will have a negative impact on the availability of high quality affordable housing in Thurrock, including for vulnerable groups. With reduced spend, contractors' commitments to social value and holistic objectives around health and wellbeing, improving education and job creation and improving economic prosperity may also deteriorate.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report**

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author:

Kathryn Adedeji

Head of Housing Investment and Development, Housing

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30 November 2015	ITEM: 8
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Thurrock Choice Homes – Newspaper Advertising	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Dawn Shepherd – Strategy Manager, Housing	
Accountable Head of Service: Dermot Moloney – Strategic Lead, Housing	
Accountable Director: David Bull - Director of Planning, Transportation & Housing	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

Thurrock Choice Home (TCH) is the system used by Housing to allocate void properties – both Thurrock Council and Thurrock Registered Provider (RP) properties with nomination agreements.

Properties are advertised electronically on the Council and TCH websites and also on the TCH mobile site.

Properties are also advertised in the Thurrock Gazette but there is only provision for 14 properties and the cost to the Council is around £35,000 per year.

Less than 1% of applicants only view the adverts through the newspaper and therefore the housing directorate wishes to remove newspaper advertising.

An assessment of the impact has been considered and consulted upon, and measures to mitigate any adverse impacts have been considered.

The Housing Allocations policy states that properties will be advertised in the local newspaper and therefore this would be a change to the allocations policy, requiring Cabinet approval.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That the committee is asked to consider and comment on the proposed changes to advertising set out in the Housing Allocations Policy and note the proposed mitigations.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Choice Home (TCH) is the system used by Housing to allocate void properties – both Thurrock Council and Thurrock Registered Provider (RP) properties with nomination agreements.

2.2 Currently there is a weekly cycle of properties advertised and active applicants can place 2 bids each week on a property that they qualify for, in order to register an interest. A shortlist of interested applicants is drawn up once the bidding cycle ends.

2.3 Properties are advertised between Thursday and Monday each week in the following formats:

- On the TCH Website www.thurrockchoicehomes.org.uk
- On the TCH Mobile Site
- In the Thurrock Gazette (previously in the Thurrock Enquirer until 2nd July 2015)

2.4 The allocations team send out a weekly email with an electronic copy of all available properties which can be printed off or passed on electronically. There are over 60 people to whom this is currently sent – this includes housing officers, support workers and sheltered housing officers.

2.5 Once applicants have viewed the properties available they can place their bids using one of the following methods:

- Via the TCH website
- Via the TCH mobile site
- By calling the 24 hour automated bidding line
- By texting

2.6 When the bidding cycle ends, the results are also shown on the website, mobile site and in the Gazette.

2.7 The cost of advertising through the websites and mobile site is included in the operating cost of the choice based letting system.

2.8 The cost of advertising properties in the Thurrock Gazette is around £35,000 per year.

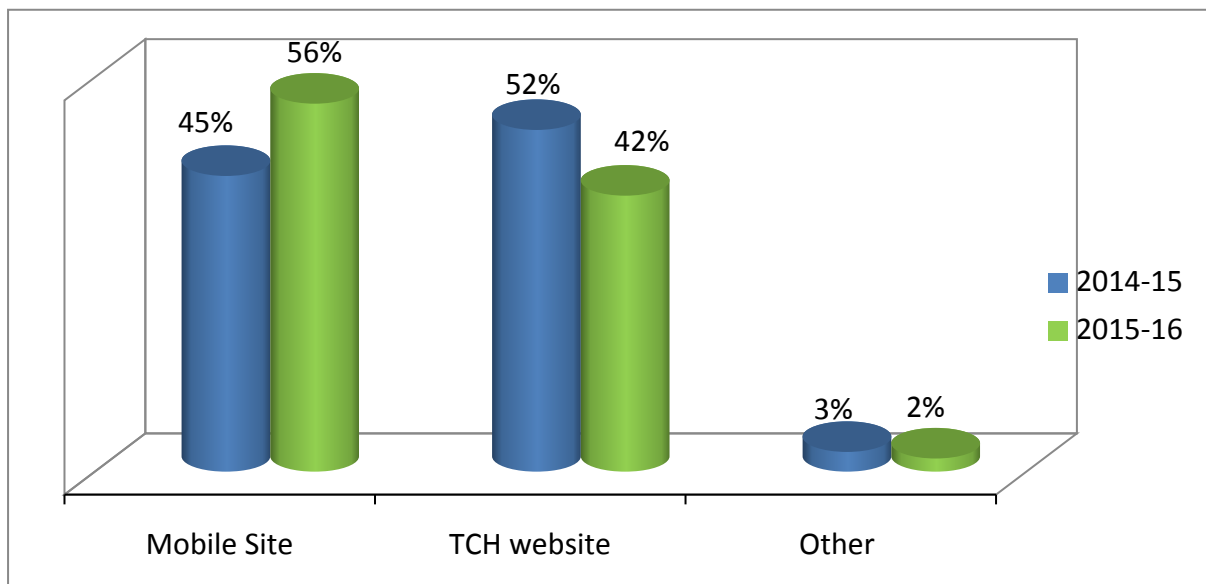
2.9 It is therefore essential to ensure this is good value for money.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 In the year 2014-15 most people placed bids via the websites or mobile site, with only 3 % using one of the other methods (Text or phone). In order to

place a bid on the website or mobile site applicants would also view available properties at the same time. Websites were most popular with 45% of bids.

But during the first half of the year 2015-16 the mobile site took over as the most popular option for placing bids and only 2% used neither the website nor mobile site – see comparison below:



In summary – 98% of applicants bidding now use the digital option which means at least 98% are viewing properties on these sites.

3.2 To investigate further, a survey of TCH users was undertaken from 25th June to 29th July 2015 to find out how applicants viewed the adverts each week.

The survey was available online and advertised via the TCH website. A message and a later reminder were sent to every live applicant (over 5,000) inviting them to participate.

To ensure the views of those needing assistance to bid were captured, officers at the hubs were asked to complete the survey with applicants when they assisted them to place a bid.

423 people responded to the survey – of which:

- 57% of applicants said they never received, or obtained for themselves, a copy of the newspaper;
- Only 19% received or obtained for themselves a copy of the newspaper every week;
- 3% said they only looked at adverts in the newspaper i.e. not on the web or mobile sites;
- However, of that 3% - 77% went on to use the website to bid anyway which meant they could view properties there.

This indicates that of the people surveyed 0.7% only used the newspaper adverts to view properties and not the digital options.

With current Housing waiting list figures this represents around 65 active applicants. Whilst not a high number, there needs to be a means of identifying and assisting such customers, if the adverts are to be removed.

- 3.3 Subsequently, officers carried out a consultation period with groups representing vulnerable people to consider the possible impacts and how they could be mitigated.

The following groups were considered to be most impacted by the removal of adverts:

- The elderly;
- Those with no access to computers or mobile telephones;
- Those with learning disabilities;
- The housebound who could not visit places where assistance could be given.

The consultation identified ways of mitigating the impacts as follows:

- Provision of support in libraries and hubs – volunteers can show applicants the full list of adverts on computer with more detail than available in the newspaper;
- Sheltered housing officers could visit or discuss bids on the telephone with elderly residents wishing to transfer;
- Assisted bidding could be put in place for those who needed it – this involves a specific option for each individual – for example a telephone call from the allocations team to discuss available properties or sending out a list of properties each week. This system is already in place for over 100 applicants including those in need of specially adapted properties and could be expanded;
- Many applicants already have family members who place bids on their behalf and who could therefore look at properties for them. This option could be encouraged;
- Young people could be encouraged to assist older applicants – this idea has been mooted with the Youth Cabinet and at least two volunteers have already been identified;
- Making better use of the systems' "Auto Bid" function whereby the computer matches applicants to suitable properties based on their needs and requirements including areas of choice and property type. It was noted that should this option be used there would need to be more flexibility around an offer refusal if the applicant had not personally placed the bid themselves;
- Local area co-ordinators and support workers at Family Mosaic hubs could provide the page of adverts which can be pulled off the TCH website or is received via email from the Allocations team each

week. Currently over 60 people receive the email but this could be expanded to more support workers and also to applicants.

The consultation also identified that digital options were increasingly becoming the only choice – for example online applications for housing and benefits and therefore this was a natural progression.

It was also recognised that the website meets the needs of those for whom English is not their first language, with a comprehensive translating service that translates the website into 49 different languages.

The website also provides a British Sign language translation service and “Browse Aloud” functions for the blind and visually impaired, and for those who cannot read.

- 3.4** The consultation identified the need for a rigorous advertising campaign to ensure that applicants were made aware of changes and alternative ways of receiving property information. This could include open day events.

A lead in period of at least 2 months was identified.

Officers would work closely with groups representing those identified as likely to be affected most to ensure alternatives are in place prior to the changeover.

Advertising of the changes would be carried out in the Thurrock Gazette.

The Equality Impact assessment carried out by Thurrock Diversity Network – at Appendix 1 - highlighted a number of options for mitigating any adverse impacts on those most likely to be affected by the changes. These options will be carefully considered and a plan for introducing the changes will be set out in the report which goes to Cabinet.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Research carried out has indicated that advertising properties in the newspaper is meeting the need of a very small group of people and at £35,000 per year is disproportionately and unreasonably expensive.
- 4.2 Due to the lack of available space in the newspapers, the number of properties that can be advertised each week is limited to 14; also, tight deadlines for printing have to be met so last minute properties can get left out. Therefore those people who only use this option to view properties are at risk of not being able to view everything that is available for them and may be unaware of a suitable property. In comparison the website and mobile sites show all properties and can be updated by staff up to the last minute before advertising starts, ensuring maximisation of adverts.

4.3 Newspaper advertising does not offer translation services available via the website and mobile site.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Consultation sessions were held and representatives from 17 different local organisations were sent details of the proposals and invited to a consultation event or to provide written feedback. Groups included those representing the elderly, physically and mentally disabled, those with learning disabilities and those suffering from domestic abuse.

Thurrock Council housing officers - estate, rents, welfare, allocations, sheltered and homeless - attended an event and discussed options for mitigating any impacts.

Officers attended the following groups to discuss the proposals:

- Thurrock Mental health forum;
- Thurrock Housing and safeguarding group (includes Adult Social care and Family Mosaic support groups)
- Thurrock Diversity Network

Formal written feedback was received from these groups and an equality impact assessment was prepared by the Thurrock Diversity Network (Appendix 1).

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 Encouraging use of digital media instead of costly newspaper advertising meets with the Council's aims for creating an excellent customer experience at the lowest possible transaction cost - providing excellent online transactional services to support our residents in serving themselves.

6.2 Encouraging applicants to use digital solutions also encourages learning and opportunity and builds pride and responsibility. It also encourages less use of paper promoting a greener environment.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Financial accountant, Corporate Finance

Removal of adverts from the newspaper represents a saving to the Council of around £35,000 per year.

There will be no extra cost for the digital solution which is already in use.

There may be some initial extra cost involved in the lead up to the change to enable extra advertising and possible events, but this will be a one off expense.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**
Housing Solicitor and Team Leader

An allocation scheme must include a statement as to the housing authority's policy on offering people a choice of accommodation or the opportunity to express preferences about the accommodation to be allocated to them (s.166A Housing Act 1996). It is for housing authorities to determine their policy on providing choice or the ability to express preferences.

The Council has opted to use a Choice Based lettings system to advertise available properties, so that applicants can express a choice over where and how they live by bidding for properties.

There is no legal requirement to advertise properties in the newspaper but Thurrock's Allocations policy states that newspaper advertising will be used and therefore a change to the allocation policy will be required. Cabinet approval is required for such changes.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development & Equalities manager

The report clearly indicates that some people will be impacted by the proposal and that these people will meet the protected equality groups i.e. elderly and disabled. However the number is likely to be very minimal.

Consultation with groups representing the elderly and disabled has been undertaken and many options for mitigating the impact have been identified and will be implemented if the recommendation is agreed.

An equality impact assessment has been carried out by Thurrock Diversity Network with proposals for actions to mitigate the negative impacts.

The report has also highlighted a positive impact for using websites for those who need assistance with translations, the visually impaired and those with literacy needs.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment prepared by Thurrock Diversity Network

Report Author:

Dawn Shepherd

Strategy Manager, Housing

Thurrock Diversity Network Limited



General Meeting, Thursday 15th October 2015

The Beehive 6pm – 8pm

Measuring the impact of changes to Thurrock Choice Homes Advertising of properties in local Newspapers.

About Thurrock Diversity Network

Thurrock Diversity Network is a Society for the Benefit of the Community, working for the benefit of disabled adult residents of Thurrock through the promotion of citizenship and the development of inclusive communities. We support and encourage disabled people's active participation and full integration into society. Thurrock Diversity Network campaigns through User-Led consultation and co-production initiatives (including Equality Impact Assessments) to shape and influence local and national policies and strategies affecting disabled people of all impairment types.

About the changes to Thurrock Choice Homes Advertising of properties in local Newspapers.

Thurrock Council Housing Directorate recently carried out some research into the use of newspapers for advertising Council properties which were available for bidding through Thurrock Choice Homes. Subsequently, Thurrock Council Housing Directorate are considering how they advertise properties in the future.

Thurrock Council Housing Directorate wanted to consider the impact of removing newspaper adverts on various equality groups – in particular older people and vulnerable people and those who are not IT literate - and what could be done to mitigate any impacts such as assisted bidding, help at hubs, etc.

As part of this engagement process, the Strategy Manager, Housing Business Improvement, was invited to speak and present at the October meeting of Thurrock Diversity Network, where the background and context of the initiative was explained, including the relevant processes, along with a number of key points (below).

Summary background and context

Thurrock Choice Homes (TCH) Bidding Process

- *TCH allocates empty properties on a weekly cycle, through the TCH website – Thursday – Monday via PC / Phone / Tablet.*
- *Also advertised in the Thurrock Gazette.*
- *The TCH Website has several accessibility options including 49 different languages, a British Sign Language (BSL) option, adjustable font sizes and “Browse Aloud.”*
- *The website shows all available properties.*
- *The Gazette only shows 14 properties.*
- *Anyone can look and you have to register online to bid – Help is available at libraries and hubs.*

The List

- *6737 active applicants.*
- *To be able to bid people have to have a local connection or a special reason, for example: if fleeing domestic violence.*

The Survey of TCH users

- *Newspaper advertising - £35,000 p/a.*
- *89% of applicants under 65 years old.*
- *21% of applicants identify as disabled (over 1000 people).*
- *17 applicants – blind or visually impaired.*
- *5.6% said they needed assisted bidding (375 people on form).*
- *2.75% would like TCH to bid on their behalf (185 people).*
- *12.76% said could not go out alone (840 people).*

- *In the first quarter of 2015-16 there was an increase in the percentage of people using the mobile site to bid, so that this is now the most popular means of placing a bid.*

KEYPOINT:

98% of bidding applicants now place bids via the TCH mobile site or website

- *The cost of advertising properties on the website and mobile site is included in the contract for the TCH system.*
- *There is an extra cost for advertising in the Thurrock Gazette, which amounts to around £35k per year and is paid for from the HRA.*

ISSUE:

Is paying for adverts in the newspaper good value for money?

ISSUE:

If adverts are removed from the newspaper, how are those who do not have the capacity or means to view adverts via the website or mobile site assisted?

Recommendations:

1. *A full impact assessment is undertaken to determine the impact of removing TCH adverts from the newspaper;*
2. *Consultation with equality groups and service users is undertaken as part of the impact assessment;*
3. *The assessment identifies ways of mitigating any impact;*
4. *Following, and subject to, the outcomes of the impact assessment, a recommendation is taken to November Housing O & S that the TCH newspaper adverts are removed in order to provide savings to the HRA with provisions in place to identify and assist the vulnerable and those requiring assistance.*

Thurrock Diversity Network members then provided input, views and feedback, covering three key areas:

- a) **Information about the diversity of the people potentially impacted by the proposed removal of Newspaper adverts for Thurrock Choice Homes. (Considering evidence in relation to Disability).**
- b) **How the proposed removal of Newspaper adverts for Thurrock Choice Homes could impact upon Disabled/older people/carers.**
- c) **Actions that could be taken to reduce/minimise potential negative impacts and deliver positive impacts? Consider possible alternative options that may be available.**

Each of these key areas is addressed in turn below:

<p>(a) The diversity of the people potentially impacted by the proposal</p>	<p>(b) How the proposal could impact upon Disabled/older people/carers.</p>	<p>(c) Actions that could be taken to reduce/minimise potential negative impacts and deliver positive impacts</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people, people with age-related conditions • Disabled people • People with mental health conditions • People with limited/no literacy skills will need recognition and particular support to become aware of the website and to be able to bid using the website • People with limited/no I.T. skills will need recognition and particular support to bid using the website • People with no Internet connection at home • People with no family or local friends network • People with dementia and related conditions • Carers may be placed under extra stress if required to support people to use the online bidding. • People with limited capacity 	<p>We believe that there is a substantial minority of people interested in social housing who do not have the skills/abilities to access online, or potentially written material.</p> <p>Our experience as an advocacy provider is that people who struggle to understand and access even simple application processes, will, in the first instance, avoid the process, until “forced” to by circumstance, and will need assistance and support to make the right choices.</p> <p>We agree that the adverts in the Gazette are costly and do not seem to be effective, other than to “steer” people to the website.</p> <p>£35,000 is a lot of money: However we are worried that some people who are really vulnerable might not remember that there are properties available – so stay on the list for long periods of time.</p>	<p>A better advert with details of how to access the housing system in all ways would likely be much more effective, informative and useful for people.</p> <p>Could there be some sort of automatic reminder system that every 6 months sends a letter to people showing/including the list and asking if they are still interested. This will help them remember they have an opportunity</p> <p>Save £30,000 and pay an existing support organisation like TCIL £5,000 per year to have a 10am – 3 pm phone line that can provide advice, information and guidance and face-to-face appointments.</p> <p>Give a “special log in” to certain people / community organisation locally that they can look in detail at what’s on offer or bid easily on behalf of others and have details of what / how many bids won what</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with sensory impairments (hearing and or sight) • People with learning differences/difficulties 	<p>We are concerned about the potential reasons for the low uptake of the Enquirer as a source for TCH bidding. Is the 3% using the newspaper only due to the limited distribution of the relevant newspaper?</p> <p>Thurrock Council needs to ensure that the public are made aware of the forthcoming changes and to give clear details of all of the alternatives</p> <p>Vulnerable people needing support having to share confidential information with “strangers” e.g. Hub volunteers is a potential concern, staff and volunteers need sufficient confidentiality and client care training.</p> <p>Currently, the list in the Newspaper comprising of successful bids is the only way that you can satisfy yourself that your bid was correctly listed/registered, in preference and how many bids on certain properties took place, this is really useful.</p> <p>People may be more inclined to downsize if the process of bidding is as easy as possible and is as accessible as possible.</p>	<p>property – to help bid appropriately and increase odds.</p> <p>Provide an audio description of the properties available have a specific link to this online – with a link or contact details to above</p> <p>Website to give better details of properties – i.e. recent photograph (or intended illustration, if a new build) a floorplan, room sizes, local facilities, civic amenities (e.g. Close to G.P. bus stops, shops – more like “Right Move” – this would save people viewing unsuitable properties – This will enable people to make an informed bid.</p> <p>The Right of people to refuse a property needs to be clear. The website should be clearer on availability and possibility of adaptations for properties</p> <p>There needs to be better joined up working and support for people who are unable to access the website at all and unable to bid without help – i.e. a LAC missed an opportunity to bid for a vulnerable individual to downsize. And Families needing to downsize because of the Bedroom Tax.</p>
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	<p>People would be disadvantaged unless measures of mitigation (above) are put into place.</p> <p>Without information in the Newspaper adverts it wouldn't be possible to identify which properties and areas are the most popular. Having this information available means that people can use their bids wisely.</p> <p>Some Disabled people may not want to move, their surroundings are familiar, so they may be less inclined to bid.</p> <p>Mixed experiences of using the bidding system – some experiences of using bidding system had been positive.</p> <p>Some negative experience and had missed out on entirely suitable properties and other people had leapfrogged the queue.</p> <p>See the importance of digital inclusion but also recognise that some vulnerable groups would want a telephone call and to talk to someone, rather than to bid online</p>	<p>The list of successful bids that currently appears in the newspaper should be available digitally via the website and on email to anyone who participated in that bidding process during that week</p> <p>Print a weekly TCH sheet and make this available to those who need it. Also display in Civic areas, community centres, halls, buildings, hubs and libraries, as there are not hubs in every area across Thurrock.</p> <p>There needs to be an allocated staff member for individual bidders, who knows the individual's needs and preferences who can liaise with clients regarding suitable properties in their chosen area and make personalised bids. For example, use the money saved to employ specialist peripatetic housing advisors who can visit hubs and peoples' homes to assist in starting the process for those in need (e.g. receiving referrals from the LACs).</p> <p>People should be able to use a Freephone number to speak to staff about properties available that meet your bidding criteria.</p>
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		<p>There needs to be awareness raising and free training available for individuals and organisations about the accessibility options that are on the website e.g. BSL, Browse Aloud etc.</p> <p>The “Go On UK” Indicators of Digital Exclusion and Basic Digital Skills are a useful resource when considering local impacts: http://www.go-on.co.uk/resources/heatmap/#area-search-form-container (searchable by postcode).</p>
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Conclusion and Recommendations

Taken in the round, it is evident that disabled people and older people and those with limited, familial/carer or social network support, those with limited or no I.T. and/or literacy skills are most likely to be negatively adversely impacted upon by the proposed removal of Newspaper adverts for Thurrock Choice Homes.

We recommend that the potential impacts detailed in this Report be considered and that necessary support be put in place (achieved via multi-agency/cross-Directorate cooperation and funding wherever possible).

Also, that the suggested actions detailed above be taken to reduce/minimise potential negative impacts. Where this involves implementation of reasonable adjustments and improvements to the accessibility of the bidding process including provision of alternative formats and necessary support, advice and guidance, that steps are taken by Thurrock Council Housing Directorate and partners to ensure that disabled people, older people and other vulnerable groups are actively included, engaged and consulted throughout any intended process.

Thurrock Diversity Network – October 2015

**Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Work Programme
2015/16**

Dates of Meetings: ~~17 June 2015, 2 September 2015~~, 30 November 2015, 6 January 2016, 17 February 2016, 16 March 2016

Topic	Lead Officer	Date
Housing Investment and Development	Kathryn Adedeji	17 June 2015
Homeless Prevention Strategy	Dermot Moloney	17 June 2015
Right to Move	Dermot Moloney	17 June 2015
Update on Repairs Policy	Kathryn Adedeji	2 September 2015
Homelessness Prevention Strategy	Dawn Shepherd	2 September 2015
Elizabeth Gardens – local lettings plan (exception for 2 bed properties)	Dawn Shepherd	2 September 2015
Local Lettings Plan - Seabrooke Rise and Derry Avenue	Dawn Shepard/Kathryn Adedeji	30 November 2015
Implications Welfare Reform Bill 2015 on HRA Business Plan	Kathryn Adedeji	30 November 2015
Thurrock Choice Homes Adverts	Dermot Moloney	30 November 2015
Shaping the Council Budget Update - Change to the Fees and Charges	Sean Clark	6 January 2016

Updated: 19 October 2015

Allocation Policy Update	Dermot Moloney	6 January 2016
Improving Energy Efficiency	Kathryn Adedeji	6 January 2016
Housing Services Performance Update	Dermot Moloney	6 January 2016
Housing Strategy Action Plan	Dermot Moloney	6 January 2016
Rent Setting	Richard Parkin/Mike Jones	6 January 2016
Flexible Tenancies	Dermot Moloney	6 January 2016
Right to Move	Dermot Moloney	6 January 2016
Shaping the Council Budget Update on themed items as and when required	Sean Clark	17 February 2016
Housing Asset Management Plan	Kathryn Adedeji	17 February 2016
Housing Investment Programmes Update	Kathryn Adedeji	17 February 2016
Rent Setting	Richard Parkin/Mike Jones	17 February 2016
Shaping the Council Budget Update on themed items as and when required	Sean Clark	16 March 2016
Damp and Mould Update	Kathryn Adedeji	16 March 2016
Housing Strategy Action Plan – End of Year Update	Dermot Moloney	16 March 2016

- Homelessness Strategy will be added to the 2016/17 Work Programme for September 2016