



<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>10 October 2018</b>
<b>Part:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	
Contact:	Portfolio Holder for Housing Cllr Margaret Griffiths Tracy Vause – Pre Tenancy Team Leader Natasha Beresford – Strategic Housing Group Manager
Purpose of report:	1.To provide information about the direct offer list that is used in relation to allocation of accommodation in line with our Allocations Policy
Recommendations	1.For members to consider the report and provide feedback regarding the direct offer process.  2.For members to consider whether they require a more frequent update regarding the analysis and delivery of the Allocations Policy.
Period for post policy/project review	In relation to point 2 above, members may wish to consider whether an annual report regarding the Allocations Policy is appropriate.
Corporate objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Strong and vibrant communities</li> <li>• Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those in the greatest need</li> </ul>
Implications:	<u>Financial</u>  The direct offer list allocations and lettings are managed within the existing resource in the allocations team
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u>  The opportunity to operate a direct offer list enables the Council to identify suitable properties for applicants in a managed way, so that it reduces the potential for bidding on unsuitable properties and the costs associated with administering these bids and the expectations of the applicants.
Risk implications	The direct offer list enables the strategic housing team to ensure that appropriate accommodation is identified based upon the individual needs of the applicant, thereby reducing the risk of the property being unsuitable.

Community Impact Assessment	Community Impact Assessment carried out 27 October 2017
Health and safety Implications	The process for the administration and management of applicants on the direct offer list is designed to review the risks at an individual case level and therefore the health and safety implications are considered.
Consultees: (including feedback from Scrutiny where appropriate)	Natasha Beresford, Strategic Housing Group Manager  Fiona Williamson, Assistant Director, Housing
Background papers:	2017 Allocations Policy
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

## 1. Introduction

1.1. Earlier this financial year, members raised queries regard the allocations process and direct offers in relation to the performance of Empty Homes. Allocation of accommodation, specifically in relation to direct offers can often require assessment of an applicant's multiple needs, which may involve a range of sources and can impact on the key to key time for some of our Empty Homes. Members had requested further details regarding the Direct Offer list and how this is managed.

## 2. Context

2.1. In line with our 2017 Allocations Policy, the Strategic Housing Service manages a direct offer list in order to offer accommodation to applicants on the Housing Register outside of the Choice Based Lettings system that we operate. The Allocations Policy states:

On some occasions, properties will be allocated through a direct offer. A direct offer means that an applicant will not bid on properties but will receive one offer of suitable accommodation. Direct offers are made by the housing service outside of the choice based lettings system. When making a direct offer the council is required to consider the suitability of a property for all members of the household. These offers are used as part of our approach to preventing homelessness. Applicants who are given a homelessness status at the point of receiving the main housing duty will receive one direct offer of suitable accommodation. In addition to homeless applicants, direct offers may also be used:

- To match applicants requiring complex adaptations to a suitable property;
- For applicants living in Mother & Baby units;
- In the case of hard-to-let properties (advertised at least twice with no suitable bids);
- For applicants in high-risk priority groups (see 4.0) where a sensitive letting is required; or
- For individual cases that would usually fall outside of this policy but have an urgent or high risk housing need (these offers can only be approved by the internal Housing Panel)

2.2. This report will provide an explanation of the direct offer list in relation to the allocations process and how cases are determined to be managed by this route. It will also provide an insight into how the direct offer list is managed and monitored on a day to day basis.

### 3. Management of the direct offer list

3.1. Direct offers are made by the Strategic Housing Service outside of the choice based lettings system. A direct offer means that an applicant will not bid on properties but will receive one offer of suitable accommodation. When making a direct offer the council is required to consider the suitability of a property for all members of the household.

3.2. Currently we hold 2 separate lists, one for homeless direct offers and one for all other applicants including those with a major adaptive need. This allows us to ensure that we are balancing the amount of direct offers equally between homeless, homeseekers and transfer applicants. Wherever possible we balance direct offer allocations equally across all applicant types. Our aim is to ensure that each offer of accommodation is suitable to meet the applicants housing need. Approximately 30% of direct offers are made to homeless applicants to allow them to have settled accommodation and to also ensure movement continues through our temporary accommodation stock.

3.3. The tables below show the numbers by size and type of property, currently awaiting a direct offer:

<b>Homeless direct offers</b>		
Size of property	Number of applicants	Oldest entry on list
1 bed	4	June 2018
2 bed	13	Feb 2018
3 bed	5	Aug 2018
4 bed and upwards	0	

<b>Homeseeker and transfer list (decisions from panel, adaptive requirements)</b>					
Size of property	Total applicants	Number of applicants with adaptive need	Oldest entry on list	Number of applicants with move for other reasons	Oldest entry on list
EPD	23	15	Apr 2015	8	July 2014
1 bed	29	23	Oct 2013	6	June 2016
2 bed	32	20	Aug 2014	12	Dec 2015
3 bed	2	2	Nov 2015	0	
4 bed	1	1	Apr 2018		

#### **4. Approving applicants for a direct offer**

- 4.1. Homeless applicants are added to the list by the Homeless Prevention and Assessment Officer once a full duty decision is given. Details of the household composition, size of property required and area preference are provided and area preferences or necessities and any medical requirements are also noted to enable to Pre Tenancy team to match them to a suitable property.
- 4.2. All other applicants on the direct offer list are either added following a report being agreed by Housing Panel or where an adaptive need has been identified following receipt of medical documentation. In such cases where there is adaptive requirements, all medical information is fully assessed with the support of a Medical Advisor and professional recommendations are obtained from an Occupational Therapist, to ensure that wherever possible the best possible match for a property can be obtained.
- 4.3. A large proportion of our current list is made up of applicants waiting for a property as adaptations are not possible in their current property due to a number of factors which may include the location, size, access. Due to the limitations of our stock this often means that there is a long wait for a suitable property to be identified. This is in part due to the fact that across a financial year, the service receives approximately 550 properties across all sizes to be re-let, not all of which are suitable for adaptations.

#### **5. Managing the direct offer list**

- 5.1. As part of the Lettings and Empty homes process each property is visited before being returned to the Council. (except in cases where access is not possible or we were not previously made aware i.e./ abandonments). This allows us to know what size stock is coming back and also make a first assessment on whether there are adaptations in situ or if adaptations would be feasible based on access and size or layout. Transfer visits are undertaken by the Lettings team for each existing tenant being considered for a move. Pre void inspections are completed upon receipt of termination forms for tenants.

5.2. All properties returned are first assessed against the direct offer list before going to advert, so that we can make a decision on whether to use a property for an applicant with an adaptive need, or offer to another applicant who is waiting. The split between direct offers and properties advertised is generally 30% direct offer, 70% advert. This can vary on occasion if we identify a number of properties suitable for adaptation or have to make a higher percentage of direct offers to assist with urgent cases, such as a serious threat to life or ongoing safety.

## **6. Concerns and areas of improvement**

6.1. Where possible it is preferable for an applicant to be able to bid on properties to allow them choice although in some circumstances this is not possible. It is challenging to manage the expectations of applicants on the direct offer list, whilst we make every effort to offer to the person that has been waiting longest, in some cases particularly adaptations, individual requirements can vary greatly and extent of adaptations possible is dependent on the property type. Where a property is determined unsuitable for an applicant on the list, we must proceed to the next most suitable applicant, to ensure that we are making best use of stock.

6.2. Due to limitations within our housing stock, there can be a significant waiting period for applicant's with an adaptive need particularly, as can be seen from the table provided earlier in the report. This can be increasingly challenging if applicants are awaiting a sheltered dwelling or 2-bedroom property. Additional challenges are found when applicants are required to move to a specific area and we must wait for suitable accommodation to become available.

6.3. A number of applicants have been on the list for a lengthy time period and are unlikely to have regular contact with the service, this is due to ongoing resource pressures to manage the direct needs of many applicants on the housing register. This could mean that their circumstances have changed and they no longer have an urgent need to move and in medical cases could mean that we do not have up to date medical information. The service is currently looking to address resource issues and will be implementing plans to improve the quality of information currently held, this will include a full review of each applicant on the list looking at the reason they are on the list and a review of any relevant medical information if appropriate.

6.4. A full work stream review is currently being undertaken to identify the opportunity to streamline existing procedures and make the most effective use of resources. Further consideration is being given to proposals to improve the existing Civica system, to enable increased automation of manual processes, providing greater efficiency.

## **7. Conclusion**

7.1 This report has provided members with an overview of the direct offer list in relation to the allocations process, which is delivered by the Strategic Housing Service. Management of allocations and direct offers has a direct link on the key to key time for void properties and re-let figures.