

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

23 February 2015

### Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

## 1 DAILY BIDDING REPORT

### Summary

**This report seeks Members approval on the implementation of a daily bidding system in respect of the Kent choice based lettings scheme.**

### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Since 2009 the Council has operated a choice based letting scheme to allocate affordable housing in the Borough. The scheme is delivered county wide through the Kent Choice Based Lettings Partnership. All 13 Kent local authorities are members of the partnership as are the majority of Registered Providers operating in Kent.
- 1.1.2 Choice Based Lettings allows qualifying applicants to express their interest in (bid for) available homes and the publishing of feedback regarding the allocation of these homes.
- 1.1.3 At present available homes are advertised for a period of five days in fortnightly cycles. Having such bidding cycles introduces inefficiencies and delays with the allocation of available homes. For example, homes becoming available to advertise just after the deadline for a forthcoming bidding cycle will need to wait a further two weeks before they can be advertised in the following cycle.
- 1.1.4 The move to daily bidding is about the continuous advertising of available homes. Operationally the aim is to reduce the delays with letting these homes by allowing landlords to advertise them as soon as they become available.
- 1.1.5 Applicants will be able to view the advert for a minimum period of seven days during which time they can bid for the home if they so wish. Where the minimum period expires during a weekend, the date will be extended to Sunday at midnight. To make it clear for customers property adverts will show a 'bidding closes' date.
- 1.1.6 As there are no advertising deadlines within the daily bidding system this will assist our Registered Provider partners with letting their homes more efficiently

and give more flexibility with managing their resources. Customers will be advised to check regularly for new properties as homes may be added daily.

- 1.1.7 Customers will continue to be able to bid by logging into the Kent Homechoice website, using their digital TV, using the Kent Homechoice mobile apps, telephoning or dropping into the Council, by text message or through staff and/or agency assistance. Free internet access is available at Council offices and libraries across Kent.
- 1.1.8 Customers will no longer be able to use postal coupons to bid as these rely on our contractor (Locata) to add or change bids manually. Daily bidding makes this arrangement impractical. To put this into context, since September 2014 there have been only four bids placed by two customers using this method of bidding.
- 1.1.9 Daily bidding means that there will no longer be a printed property sheet. At present there are four customers who pay to receive this and a further seventeen who the Council provide a copy to assist with their participation in the scheme. Of the four who subscribe, one was housed in January this year. The strategy for ensuring there is no adverse impact on these customers is set out in section 1.3 of this report.

## **1.2 Analysis of the daily bidding pilot**

- 1.2.1 As reported previously to this Board, Swale Borough Council and Amicus Horizon have piloted daily bidding on behalf of the Kent Choice Based Lettings Partnership. This began on 14 February 2014.
- 1.2.2 The implementation of the daily bidding system was a relatively smooth process, with most issues being corrected in the first few days. An evaluation meeting was held on 18 June 2014 at which the findings of the pilot were discussed.
- 1.2.3 Amicus Horizon reported that bidding did not appear to have been adversely affected by the removal of bidding cycles. Interestingly, the number of bids per property increased due to higher participation. Furthermore through daily bidding they were able to let their homes more quickly with evidence that the pilot has reduced void turnaround times. Management and staff have expressed strong views that the new system is more effective and efficient, and has had a positive effect on workloads.
- 1.2.4 Swale Borough Council and Amicus Horizon both made efforts to ensure that vulnerable people received the additional support they needed during the pilot period. It was noted that 45 per cent of households who they identified as vulnerable were placing bids for available homes compared to 42 per cent of households who had no identified vulnerability.
- 1.2.5 Following the success of the pilot, Swale Borough Council and Amicus Horizon have now fully implemented the new system.

### **1.3 Implementation Timetable**

- 1.3.1 The technical changes to the housing register system (Locata) are planned to be completed during February 2015. However, the Council will be able to continue advertising properties in fortnightly cycles following these changes being made.
- 1.3.2 The aim is to go live with daily bidding on 16 March 2015, subject to Member approval and satisfactory testing of the new system.
- 1.3.3 Prior to implementation we will contact all those applicants who currently receive assistance with bidding (20 households) as well as those who receive property sheets (21 households) to discuss how we can ensure their continued participation with our choice based lettings scheme. We will explain the various methods available for bidding and signpost them to available support where necessary. We will also offer customers direct assistance with bidding if they so wish.
- 1.3.4 We will contact the 19 households who we currently assist with bidding, which include those who have been identified as vulnerable, to explain the changes. No adverse impact on these households has been identified as a result of the changes, however we wish to contact them personally so that they fully understand the changes and offer reassurance that we will continue to assist them with bidding in the same way.
- 1.3.5 We will be writing to all households on the housing register to inform them of the changes being made. We will also be running campaigns both online and through social media and providing information in the form of a leaflet that will be available in Council offices.
- 1.3.6 We will ensure that key staff, such as customer service officers, are aware of the changes and are able to advise and support our customers appropriately.

### **1.4 Legal Implications**

- 1.4.1 None arising from this report.

### **1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.5.1 It is estimated that the final cost to rollout this system across Kent will be £35,750. The Kent Choice Based Lettings Partnership will meet the cost of this enhancement using existing funds that are collected from all of the existing partners.

### **1.6 Risk Assessment**

- 1.6.1 No risk identified.

### **1.7 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.7.1 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact on those who receive printed property sheets or currently receive assistance with bidding has been analysed and varies between groups of people.
- 1.7.2 The results of the analysis indicate that those who currently receive assistance with bidding (20 households) or property sheets (21 households) include a higher proportion of households with disabilities and those aged over 65. We will contact those affected to set out the options available for bidding and signpost them to available support where necessary. Further information regarding how we will support these customers with the change is detailed in section 1.3 of this report.
- 1.7.3 We will regularly monitor whether those affected by the removal of property sheets and those who require assistance with bidding are participating in daily bidding and review whether they have received sufficient support as appropriate. The full analysis is set out in **[ANNEX 1]**.

## **1.8 Policy Considerations**

- 1.8.1 The Kent Choice Based Lettings scheme touches upon a number of key corporate priorities including Housing, Health and Wellbeing, Community Safety and Children and Young People

## **1.9 Recommendations**

- 1.9.1 **CABINET** is **RECOMMENDED** to **APPROVE** the Council moves to a daily bidding system.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Jason Wheble

Nil

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health