



FULL COUNCIL - INFORMATION REPORT

Date Written	24 th January 2018
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Service Area	Housing Solutions Team
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	7 th February 2018

To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

Notification of the activation date ('go live date') of Council's new Common Housing Allocations Policy called '*Living Merthyr Tydfil*'

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Following a consultation exercise with Councillors, the public and partner organisations, including the four housing associations which own stock in Merthyr Tydfil a new Common Housing Allocations Policy was approved by Council on 22nd March 2017.
- 1.2 The policy was approved well in advance of it being implemented as a new housing software package, called CIVICA, had to be purchased to help administer the process. The software had to be built and refined around the specific rules contained within the new policy. The new software will assist in allocating social housing in accordance with the Policy.
- 1.3 This report advises of the 'go live' date of the new policy, which is Tuesday, 3rd April 2018, and outlines the steps already taken and those planned to inform, advise and assist members of the public during the transition from the current policy (called Tai Dewis/Housing Choice) to the new policy called Living Merthyr Tydfil.
- 1.4 This report is for information only and does not require a decision by Council.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On the 22nd March 2017 Council approved the Common Housing Allocations Policy.
- 2.2 The report outlines the rationale for changing and improving both the common housing allocation policy itself, and the means by which members of the public seeking to apply for social housing can do so, in a far quicker way, which is also more transparent, easier to understand and digitally enabled.

3.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN FROM MARCH 2017

- 3.1 Since approval of the policy, the software developer, CIVICA, have been building the bespoke elements of the software based upon the 'rules' of the new policy. This development took approximately 6 months.
- 3.2 The new website and public facing elements of the system must be bilingual, and so all text has had to be translated into Welsh to comply with legislation. Some refinement of the Welsh version of the site will continue for the next few months.
- 3.3 The system has been robustly tested for 4 weeks by our project co-ordinator.
- 3.4 All staff have received training on the various software modules, as have our RSL partners.
- 3.5 All housing staff and relevant staff of partner organisations have been given the opportunity to have refresher training in relation to implementing the new allocations policy.
- 3.6 We are currently refining and adding to the website content, which will continue for the next few months.

4.0 OUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- 4.1 All our RSL partners are informed about the policy (as they assisted in drafting it over a 12 month period).
- 4.2 Initial communication with Councillors – this report is the first step in this regard. Additionally, the new policy and an easy read guide are now available on the new website: www.livingmerthyrdfil.org.uk. This new website domain is now active, and all Councillors are invited to visit it and the resources present on it. Please note more information will be populated onto the site over time.
- 4.3 Communication with the general public – our first article in CONTACT magazine will feature in the February edition. It is currently being finalised.
- 4.4 Communication with those households already registered on the current Tai Dewis System – all c.2,000 households on the current register will receive a letter (currently being drafted), which is to be sent on the 5th February 2018, informing them of the changes and what they must do to register on the new system.

- 4.5 Additional resource has been identified to assist with the predicted demand in dealing with households wishing to re-register for social housing. However it is worth noting that historically, when the common housing register is refreshed annually, that approximately a third of households do not respond and are therefore removed from the register. Therefore we can expect c.1,300 households to re-register from the middle of February 2018 onwards. Probably within a 6 – 10 week period.
- 4.6 Two internet enabled tablet devices have been purchased to assist with re-registration in One Stop Shop reception area.
- 4.7 Preparations have been made with reception staff/managers – to allow them to assist in the re-registration of households, thus increasing our capacity to respond to service requests.
- 4.8 Posts on Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels have been prepared.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 5.1 All costs associated with the change in systems have been met within departmental budget and Welsh Government grant.

6.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full assessment is not required at this time. The form can be accessed on the Council's website/intranet via the 'Equality Impact Assessment' link.

ALYN OWEN
CHIEF OFFICER – COMMUNITY
REGENERATION

CLLR GERAINT THOMAS
CABINET MEMBER FOR
REGENERATION & PUBLIC
PROTECTION

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Full Council Report – which approved the new Common Housing Allocation Policy	22 nd March 2017	Appendix 1 – Attached
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.