

CABINET

10 NOVEMBER 2020

Index

Changes to the Housing Options Service2
Disposal of Land Fronting St John Street adjacent to the old Library, Lichfield4

CHANGES TO THE HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE

1. Decision:

The Cabinet:

- 1.1 Approved the new arrangements for the administration of the housing register and allocations scheme.
- 1.2 Approved the revised allocation scheme at Appendix B of the Cabinet report for final consultation with registered providers, and delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Housing and Health and the Head of Regulatory Services, Housing and Wellbeing to make further amendments if required after consideration of the Registered Providers' responses and in the future if minor amendments are needed.
- 1.3 Accepted Bromford's financial offer of compensation and agreed to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Housing and Health and Head of Regulatory Services, Housing and Wellbeing to agree to vary the terms of the 2010 Deed of Covenant and Variation to the stock transfer agreement and any other variations as required.

2. Statement of Reasons:

The Cabinet report set out proposals to change the way in which the housing register and allocations scheme are administered following Bromford's reversal of its decision to manage these on the Council's behalf. The long standing agreement for this is contained in the 2010 Deed of Covenant and Variation to the 1997 housing stock transfer agreement, the proposed variation of which was set out in Appendix D of the Cabinet report.

Due to this change, after a careful consideration of the options it was proposed to operate the allocations scheme in-house and operate a Choice Based Letting system after the current one, Homes Direct, closes on 31st March 2021. Several changes would be needed to the way the housing options team worked and new staff would be needed to deal with the additional workload this would bring; the Cabinet report outlined these changes. The report also outlined minor changes needed to the new allocation scheme for social housing that was previously agreed by Cabinet in 2018.

3. Any Alternative Options:

To do nothing:

- This isn't an option as Homes Direct is now closing on 31st March 2021. We therefore need a new system to allocate social rented homes to those that we have a statutory responsibility for and others that are eligible under our allocations scheme.
- It is a legal requirement for the local authority to have an allocation scheme in place as a way of prioritising applicants to vacancies in social housing; we could not continue with the existing allocation scheme as this is outdated and does not reflect the council's new duties under the Homeless Reduction Act or emerging local priorities.

To not have our own CBL scheme and provide direct nominations:

- It would not promote customer choice or encourage the creation of sustainable tenancies and communities
- We would not have the intelligence that we need on the demand and need for social rented housing that is used to develop and inform our housing strategy, Local Plan policies or use as evidence when consulted on new planning applications
- This option may potentially need less staff, however monitoring nomination agreements with RPs and dealing with bandings and refusals of offers would also be time consuming and so it is unlikely that less staff would actually be needed. An IT system would also need to be purchased; the MRI software we propose to purchase to operate a CBL includes 2 modules- Enhanced Housing Register (EHR) and ATLAS and the cost of EHR alone that we would need to provide nominations in accordance with our allocations scheme is the same.

To join another scheme rather than having our own:

- We are unaware of another suitable scheme that we could join. Homes Direct was the CBL scheme that was used by the majority of RPs in this area. As the largest stock holder, most lettings are done by Bromford who have made the decision to withdraw from it and operate their own waiting list so our options are very limited. Bromford's decision is in line with a trend for RP's to develop their own systems and move away from CBL partnerships that cover wide geographical areas. We have explored a shared service arrangement and there are not adequate synergies with another local authority to make this a viable option.

**DISPOSAL OF LAND FRONTING ST JOHN STREET ADJACENT TO THE OLD LIBRARY,
LICHFIELD**

1. Decision:

The Cabinet approved the disposal of the land outlined on [Plan A](#) to Staffordshire County Council, on terms to be negotiated as outlined in the report.

2. Statement of Reasons:

Our records indicate the subject land is owned by LDC, and we have possession of title deeds. Our ownership is in the process of being registered with The Land Registry.

The, "Old Library" is owned by Staffordshire County Council (SCC) and shown centred on [Plan B](#) of the Cabinet report. The premises are Grade II Listed, and lie within the Lichfield City Conservation Area.

The Library has been identified for disposal by SCC following its closure, and a preferred developer has been selected to purchase the property from SCC.

Despite having access onto the Friary, to unlock the Library's full development potential a prospective developer would require our land to provide dual access and the ability to service the entire site. The cost of acquisition will invariably be factored into the price a developer is willing to pay for SCC's Library premises.

Because the proposed disposal impacts premises owned by Staffordshire County Council, it is considered prudent to bring this to Members attention, given the close working relationship between our respective organisations.

3. Any Alternative Options:

1. The land subject to disposal comprises primarily tarmacadam pavement, crossover area and nominal marginal grassed area including low level bushes.
2. The disposal as an enabler for the proposed redevelopment of the Old Library is considered the optimal use of the land.
3. Consideration was given to negotiating with SCC on a "quid pro quo" basis, on an unrelated property matter, however, this was not seen as a suitably beneficial solution, and not pursued.
4. Failure to engage with SCC and negotiate a disposal will prevent the regeneration of the former Old Library and is not a constructive approach, having negative outcomes – i.e. a missed opportunity to repurpose a heritage Landmark building, preserving its future, and enhancing the immediate locality.
5. If a satisfactory value cannot be agreed with SCC then we have the option to remain as landowner and have an interest in the scheme over the longer term. This is not seen as ideal as it is resource intensive to be involved as landowner in such a scheme.

