

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 1 st February 2017
Report Subject	Update on the Implementation of SARTH
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing
Report Author	Chief Officer, Community and Enterprise
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report updates members on the implementation of the Single Access Route to Housing Project (SARTH) across the North Wales sub region and the subsequent collaboration with Denbighshire County Council.

The SARTH policy introduced a banding allocation system and a policy that shifted away from a focus purely on registering for social housing and moved toward providing advice on all housing options.

SARTH went live in Flintshire in April 2015 and following a successful bid, Flintshire County Council will host SARTH for Denbighshire from April 2017.

The report includes data on applications and allocations and importantly demonstrates how the new approach has relieved pressure on specialist officer time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Committee notes the implementation of the policy, common register and regional collaboration developments.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	Explaining the Regional Common Policy and Register
1.01	<p>SARTH is a partnership project between all the major social landlords in North East Wales, covering the local authority areas of Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire.</p> <p>The partnership also includes Cartrefi Conwy, Clwyd Alyn, Grwp Cynefin, North Wales Housing and Wales and West Housing Associations.</p>
1.02	<p>Implementation of the New Policy and Register</p> <p>The new policy and register went live in April 2015 in both Flintshire and Conwy. The project was split into three main work streams which produced the deliverables necessary for implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ICT work stream defined and delivered changes to the existing Open Housing System and a new web-based portal for housing partners to shortlist applicants for vacancies was developed.• The communications work stream produced leaflets, posters, information booklets and new website content for the registers. This group also developed press releases to raise awareness of the change.• The operations work stream produced policy guidance documents and operational procedures to support operational staff through the implementation. <p>Between January and March 2015, all 3633 existing applicants of Flintshire County Council, Clwyd Alyn, Grwp Cynefin and Wales and West Housing Associations were contacted for a telephone interview to ascertain their current housing requirements. If an applicant was not eligible for social housing they received advice on alternative affordable options available, based on their individual requirements.</p> <p>The Community Based Accommodation Support officers were used to interview and advise applicants aged over sixty to ensure they understood the new policy. Many of these applicants expressed that they did no longer wish to move and were happy to remain in their existing accommodation.</p> <p>Over the first twelve months of operation, the new register averaged 942 live applications. Flintshire's "old" register was kept for a period of 12 months during the transition to ensure that no vulnerable cases were missed.</p>
1.03	<p>Regional Collaboration</p> <p>Following the go-live of the registers in Conwy and Flintshire, a regional panel was set-up to maximise the benefits of collaboration. The panel is formed of operational management staff from each partner organisation. The primary purpose of the panel is to ensure consistency in the application</p>

	<p>of the policy and to review complaints and appeals from applicants. The panel has been instrumental in sharing best practice and addressing wider topics such as approaches to changes in legislation and issues arising from welfare reform.</p> <p>The SARTH steering group includes senior officer representatives from all partner organisations across all three counties. The group meets when required and at least annually to serve as an escalation point for strategic issues arising out of the panel. The group has further developed partnership arrangements between landlord organisations across the region.</p>
1.04	<p>Denbighshire Bid</p> <p>In February 2016 Denbighshire Council agreed that the most efficient approach for them to join SARTH would be to partner with one of the existing councils. This would deliver efficiencies and enable them to benefit from the experience of the other host organisations. Both Cartrefi Conwy (who host the Conwy register), and Flintshire County Council were invited to bid to develop, host and manage their register.</p> <p>The council submitted a proposal that built on the success of the Housing Solutions triage approach. In July 2016 Denbighshire County Council announced that Flintshire was successful in winning the bid. Subsequently, a joint project team led by the Council has been formed to implement SARTH in Denbighshire by April 2017. There are many tangible benefits for the council in hosting both registers including consistency of approach, reduced management and ICT costs and a new income stream.</p> <p>Work is progressing well on implementation. Current feedback from Denbighshire officers is that they are pleased with the progress and grateful for the knowledge and experience that Flintshire staff are bringing to the project.</p>
1.05	<p>Performance</p> <p>A detailed report is prepared by the Council and circulated amongst housing partners on a 6-monthly basis. The report presents statistics on applications and allocations for the county. The following are some key points presented in the latest report covering April 2016 to September 2016.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As at 30th September 2016 there were 1206 live applications on the Flintshire Housing Register. This is the highest number of applications since the register went live in April 2015. • For the period 1st April 2016 to 30th September 2016 1788 enquiries were made to the Housing Solutions triage team. These enquiries can be made via telephone contact, face to face contact at one of our Connects Offices or via referrals from other agencies such as Probation, Social Services etc. • Of these 1788 enquiries received 1094 (61%) were dealt with at the first point of contact thus reducing demand on specialist officers. • Out of 1788 triages 1008 applications for social housing were made

	<p>during this period. This is an increase on the same period for 2015/16 where we received 824 applications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 1st April 2016 and 30th September 2016 the number of triages carried out has increased by 75% for the comparable period in 2015. • In addition, during the first half of 2016/17 there has been a significant increase in the number of live applications on the system with an increase of 22% when compared to the same period in 2015/16. • During the period 1st April 2016 to 30th September 2016 327 allocations of social housing were made. 193 of these allocations had an application on the waiting list for less than 6 months and a further 63 between 6 and 12 months. • The majority of the allocations (214) were made from Band 2 and a further 105 from Band 1. Both these bands only contain applicants with a local connection to Flintshire. <p>2017/18 will see additional reporting developed to provide analysis on both customer satisfaction and information on equality and diversity.</p> <p>The change to SARTH was challenging initially, but things have settled well in the last 6 months and despite the pressure of significant increases in requests for housing assistance and advice, staff are providing good quality advice and are able to direct customers to the housing solution appropriate to their needs.</p> <p>The joint work with Denbighshire County Council meets the council's objectives to work collaboratively where there are benefits to the council and its customers.</p>
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Flintshire County Council is managing the Flintshire register on behalf of the Housing Associations in the county. The Housing Associations contribute to the costs of managing the register which provides an income stream for the council as detailed below:-</p> <p>2016/17 Income from partner housing associations - £13,026 Income from Denbighshire County Council (DCC) for SARTH set up costs - £25,106.92</p> <p>2017/18 Income from partner housing associations - £22,100 Income from DCC for hosting register - £52,245</p>

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Full consultation was carried out across the region ahead of the implementation of the regional policy.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Project and operational risks to both Flintshire and Denbighshire in the management of registers are pro-actively monitored and mitigated and are subject to regular project reporting. There are no significant operational risks to report at present.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None. Contact Officer: Katie Clubb Telephone: 01352 703518 E-mail: Katie.clubb@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>SARTH – The Single Access Route to Housing Project. A regional project supported by Welsh Government to improve how we manage housing need and make best use of stock.</p> <p>Open Housing ICT system – Open Housing is the ICT that the authority uses to manage its landlord functions including register management, tenancy management, and property repairs and maintenance management.</p> <p>RSL Portal – The RSL Portal is a web based application that allows housing association partners to shortlist and allocate their properties to suitable applicants on the social housing register. The Portal also allows the associations to download statistical reports on registrations and allocations.</p> <p>Triage – The initial discussion carried out face to face or over the phone to identify a customer’s needs and requirements.</p>