

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE – 17 MAY 2006

COMMON HOUSING REGISTER

Report by the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on the development of the Common Housing Register and to seek approval to extend the development process.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As previously reported to committee on 17th March 2004 Part 1, Section 8 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires local authorities “when required to do so by the Scottish Ministers, prepare and submit to the Scottish Ministers proposals for establishing and maintaining a list of applicants for housing to be kept jointly by, or on behalf, of any two or more housing providers in connection with the allocation of housing held by them for housing purposes”.
- 2.2 East Ayrshire Council was successful in securing the maximum contribution of £100,000 from the Scottish Executive to assist in the funding of the development of a Common Housing Register (CHR) until March 2006. The Scottish Executive is continuing to support the development of CHRs through the secondment of a National CHR Policy and Practice Officer until March 2007.

3. RESEARCH

- 3.1 The Scottish Executive recently commissioned ODS Consulting to explore the experiences of partners who have already developed a CHR or are in the process of doing so. A report on the research has now been published and the main findings are as follows: -
- CHR development is primarily an exercise in joint working
 - Harmonisation of policy and practice and a willingness to compromise was considered to be important
 - The length of time which must be dedicated to CHR development before clear outcomes are produced because of focus on the CHR model rather than outputs
 - Local landlords with significant stock numbers appeared to take the lead in CHR development whereas the “regionals” and “nationals” have had a lesser involvement.
 - If all partners use the same approach to the application process, development of the CHR appears to be simpler.
 - Effective support and project management is key throughout the development, implementation and management process

- Although the primary aim of all CHRs is to improve access to housing lists for applicants at times the focus and end result can get lost in technical discussions
- In some cases the creation of the ICT solution dominated discussions and led to the CHR model being compromised due to the ability of the ICT systems to deliver
- ICT would appear to have been afforded more priority than the provision of co-ordinated housing information and advice
- The process of developing and implementing has been strongly assisted by funding from the Scottish Executive

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 Development of the Common Housing Register (SEARCH – Single East Ayrshire Register for Community Housing) began in June 2004. The core partner landlords participating in the development of SEARCH are tabled below:-

Landlord	Approximate Stock @ 31st January 2006	% of Social Rented Stock
East Ayrshire Council	14,104	87%
Atrium Homes	816	5%
Cunninghame Housing Association	238	1%
Irvine Housing Association	180	1%
Shire Housing Association	933	6%

4.2 Initially it was proposed that the register would consist of a database of applicant names and some basic information that would then be shared with each of the partner landlords; the applicant would then be contacted by each landlord to gather any further information required in order to point the applicant in accordance with their Allocation Policy. As partnership working grew and development progressed, the core partners input into the development process increased and the system specification became more complex. This was largely due to experience gleaned from other CHR projects and the core partners' wish to create a single gateway that would improve access and remove the obstacles that may confront applicants applying for social housing within East Ayrshire.

4.3 The IT solution has evolved to become a shared system that will not only provide a single database of applicants but will also point the applicant in accordance with each partner's Allocations Policy thus allowing each partner to match applicants to available properties within their organisation. By inputting, matching and offering applicants social housing from a single register the core partners will be able to view applicant information which will enhance the provision of information and advice to applicants.

4.4 By enhancing the register with the additional functionality, the cost of fully developing the new system will exceed the grant provided by the Scottish Executive. A significant amount of work is required in order to develop and

implement the register and it is envisaged that SEARCH will become operational two years from the commencement of the extended development plan.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Costs have been calculated on a pro rata basis subject to percentage of stock held by each of the partners. On that basis it is estimated that the costs to the Council of completing the system development phase will amount to £59,000. These costs can be met from within agreed HRA budgets. It is also proposed that the Council will continue to support the development through the secondment of a member of staff during the 2 year development and implementation phase

5.2 Following implementation of the CHR there will be annual recurring costs for support and maintenance of £15,000 per annum which, costed using the same stock pro rata, requires a contribution of £13,050 from HRA, rising with inflation, on an ongoing basis.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council requires to comply with the provisions of part 1 section 8 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 when called upon to do so by Scottish Ministers.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Development and subsequent implementation of an East Ayrshire Common Housing Register will not only enable the Council to comply with the statutory provisions as detailed in section 6.1 but will improve access and service delivery to applicants and provide the Council and its partners with valuable information which will assist in the delivery of Community Plan and Local Housing Strategy objectives.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that members:

- (i) Approve the proposal to continue with the development of the Common Housing Register as outlined in Paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4 above;
- (ii) Agree the additional expenditure as detailed in paragraph 5;
- (iii) Authorise the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services, in conjunction with the Head of Personnel, to submit the staffing proposals as outlined in Paragraph 5 for approval by the Corporate Governance Committee; and
- (iv) Otherwise note the terms of this report.

William Stafford
Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

CMCA/LA

27th April 2006

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1) Housing Committee Report – 17th March 2004
- 2) Case Studies in the Development and Implementation of Common Housing Registers in Scotland – Scottish Executive, April 2006

Members wishing further information should contact Gerry Darroch, Operations Manager on 01563 554873.

Implementation Officer: chris.mcaleavey@east-ayrshire.gov.uk