

DECISION NO:

18/158

For Member Services use only

Concurrence No: 066259

Action under delegated authority of Chief Executive	X
Action under delegated authority of Director of Finance and Cabinet Member for Finance	
Action taken by Chief Executive in consultation with Cabinet Member(s)	

Subject: Homefinder UK – exception to Contract Standing Orders

Signature and designation of officer(s) taking action:

[Signature]
Chief Executive

26.11.18
Date

[Signature]
Director of Finance

22.11.18
Date

[Signature]
Head of Financial Planning and Reporting

22/11/18
Date

Name of Cabinet Member(s) Consulted:

I have been consulted and concur with the proposals set out below:

Councillor
Cabinet Member for

Signature: Date:

Councillor
Cabinet Member for

Signature: Date:

Name of any member who has declared a conflict of interest in relation to this decision: _____

THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE PUBLISHED ON THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

The report overleaf sets out the decision to be taken, the reasons for the decision, and the details of alternative options, if any, considered and rejected.

Officer decisions are available for public inspection, both at the Borough Offices and on the Council's website, for a period of six years after the decision is made. Background papers are available for four years.

RECOMMENDED that:

An exception to Contract Standing Orders is granted to appoint Homefinder UK to provide access to vacant social tenancies.

Purpose

The Council faces significant homelessness pressures and as a consequence there are currently a high number of households in temporary accommodation waiting rehousing.

Currently the Council seeks to do this in two ways:

- For households who meet the criteria set out in the Broxbourne Housing Allocation scheme, they are entitled to receive an offer of a social tenancy, subject to having sufficient points.
- Assistance into the private sector via the Council *Simple Lets* Scheme.

In 2017/18 approximately 200 households were rehoused via these routes but as the numbers of applicants exceed the number of rehousing opportunities then the demand for temporary accommodation continues to increase. In addition, there are a significant minority of households who are unable to afford a home in Broxbourne or more generally in the London commuter belt areas to whom the Council still owes an ongoing duty.

Homefinder UK is a 'National Mobility Scheme' that enables access to vacant social tenancies nationally, including 'hard to let' Council and Housing Association vacancies across the country. Not only will this increase the opportunities available to homeless households but will also enhance the ability of the Council to access accommodation in cheaper areas which will undoubtedly benefit some applicants.

Homefinder UK is currently the only national mobility scheme of this kind operating in the market.

The Project

It is proposed to purchase Homefinder for one year as a pilot project to determine whether the scheme generates sufficient moves to justify the costs. Homefinder UK costs £10,000 per annum per authority for an unlimited number of moves.

However, they also offer a 'pay per move' option whereby a licence fee of £2,500 per annum is chargeable regardless of usage and a £1,100 per move thereafter. Under this model a total of seven moves would equate to £10,200 per annum. The cost of the pilot scheme can be met from existing budgets.

As the take up rate is not known and this is a pilot proposal it is suggested that the pay per usage model would be better for the Council in the first instance. This would give the Council the opportunity to evaluate the scheme and if value for money could be demonstrated a decision as to the future contract arrangements could be made in due course.

The estimated gross annual cost of placing seven households in nightly paid accommodation is £112,420. This makes this proposal a better value for money proposition.

An exception to contract standing orders is requested to engage with Homefinder UK on basis that they are the only provider of this service.

Financial, Legal and Risk Management Implications

Financial

The financial implications of this proposal are set out in the main body of the report.

Legal

The proposal would enable the Council to discharge statutory obligations on homelessness more effectively. The proposal would require the Council to sign a contract with Homefinder UK prior to the agreement going forward.

Risk

Homelessness is an area of high risk for the Council. However, this proposal is designed first and foremost to mitigate financial risk.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The alternative is not to instigate the proposal meaning the opportunity to generate potential savings and increase housing opportunities to housing applicants would be lost.

Contribution to the Council's Objectives

This proposal contributes to the objectives in helping residents affected by homelessness and disadvantage.

Equalities Implications

Households with a 'protected characteristic' (which includes age, disability, gender, race and religious affiliation) under the Equalities Act (2010) and who apply as homeless are disproportionately represented when compared to the general population.

Conclusion

This represents an opportunity to generate savings on the temporary accommodation budget by generating more rehousing opportunities whilst at the same time affording greater choice to applicants.

Contact Officer: Stephen Tingley

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Date: 10 October 2018

Action reported to the Cabinet on:
