

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
COMMITTEE:	Standards Committee
DATE:	31 October 2012
TITLE OF THE REPORT:	Update on the housing allocation process
REPORT BY:	Head of Housing Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Shan Lloyd Williams
PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:	To update Members on the position since the submission of a Report on the Role of Elected Members in the Housing Allocations Process on 14 December 2011.

1.0 Background

1.1 Two reports have been submitted to the Standards Committee of the Isle of Anglesey County Council in the last 10 months, the first in December 2011 and the second to update Members in March, 2012. Both reports specifically addressed the Housing Allocations process and the role of Elected Members in that process and the actions taken voluntarily by the Housing Services to strengthen our customer care arrangements.

Since the submission of the original Report, evidence certainly confirms that Elected Members have distanced themselves from the housing allocations process. However, a small number of cases are continuing.

1.2 A summary of the position.....

1.2.1 Sections 5.29 – 5.31 of the Welsh Assembly Government’s Code of Guidance on Housing Allocation and Homelessness 2003 stipulate that Local Members should not be involved in the housing allocation process if the accommodation is in their ward or if the main place of residence of the person to whom the property is allocated is in the Member’s ward. Further information can be seen in the Statutory Instrument 1997, No. 45 ‘Local Housing Authorities Prescribed Principles for Housing Allocation Schemes (Wales)’.

1.2.2 The Members have an active role in the housing allocation process in terms of advising and representing their local communities and ensuring that the policy is implemented fairly and consistently.

1.2.3 Elected Members can...

- Make observations on behalf of their constituency in order to ensure that all the facts of the case are taken into account in the assessment of the application.

- Advising applicants on how to apply for housing with the Council/Social Housing Landlords and on the availability of housing in their local area. This will shortly be improved through the development of a new Housing Options Website.
- Elected Members will be involved in any future reviews of the housing allocation policy to ensure that it meets its objectives. Members can also approve any Local Housing Policies where a decision is made to implement such policies.

1.2.4 Local Members cannot.....

- Decide to whom a property is to be allocated or be involved in the housing allocation process.
- Ask for details about an applicant's application or anyone else's without consent. Personal information such as names, addresses, housing circumstances etc. are covered under the 1998 Data Protection Act and the Council cannot divulge such details without the permission of the applicant.

2.0 Other actions

- 2.1 A leaflet has been produced for applicants with information about social housing, comprising a section on frequently asked questions and answers, including a question clarifying the role of Elected Members.
- 2.2 An authorisation form has been introduced for the disclosure of information to Elected Members, Members of Parliament, Assembly Members, family members or other individuals acting as advocates for the applicant.
- 2.3 A Housing Services Customer Care Unit has been established – comprising four officers including a Team Leader. The Unit has been operational since 8th August 2012. It has taken time to develop the Unit and train officers to know how to resolve issues in the first visit if possible, and where to refer requests for information, how to receive and verify applications for social housing and operate as a point of contact with the service for elected members.

The officers undertook an intense training programme and training sessions are continuing, such as training on how to identify whether documents such as notices to quit from private sector landlords are valid or not etc. There have been very few [14] recorded cases of contact by Elected Members with this unit, and every contact, including the results of enquiries, is recorded. The vast majority of Members continue to contact the Housing Services either directly through the Head of Service or Senior Managers or through the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

3.0 The Activities of the Customer Care Unit to date

3.1 Period: between 8 August and 3 October 2012

1378 visits or phone calls.

66% dealt with at the first point of contact

Nature of calls/visits – see appendix 1

3.2 Complaints received by the Unit

Number of complaints = 13, although recorded as complaints, all were minor dissatisfaction with the service, made verbally either over the reception counter or via telephone. None needed to be escalated and all were dealt with immediately.

7 complaints related to lettings and annoyance of the customer either at not being allocated a property or dissatisfaction of someone who had.

3 complaints related to repairs and maintenance, 2 customers who said they had reported repairs but felt that they had not been listened to, 1 complaint regarding the condition of property.

3 General complaints regarding street lighting (passed to highways), junk mail at an empty property considered to be a fire risk and a private landlord who had tried to evict a tenant unlawfully.

3.3 The Housing Services deal with broad areas of work and it is a credit to staff that they have developed as a Unit and gained knowledge of the various areas in a short time. It has been a steep learning curve and of course, they are still learning and aim to follow further training courses in the next year.

3.4 The Unit has recommended and implemented new working practices in order to improve the efficiency of the Housing Services and this is to be welcomed. Examples include practices around housing exchange schemes and matching vacant properties with first time buyers or applicants wishing to rent in the private sector.

4.0 Next Steps

4.1 When the Orchard IT system goes live - phase 1 at the end of November 2012 and phase 2 in the first quarter of 2013/14 - services for our customers can be further improved. An example of this is the Tenant Portal, where tenants will be able to check their rent account balance on the web, report any repair work required by indicating on diagrams or through text and submit complaints or positive comments etc. Frontline staff will also be mobile and will have the latest technology, leading to reduced costs and more effective working. The current IT system is outdated and totally unfit for purpose.

- 4.2 As a result of Welfare Benefits reform and a considerable reduction in funding available for developing new housing, the Housing Allocation Policy will need to be revisited and, in collaboration with Housing Associations operating in Anglesey, it is recommended that a single common Housing Allocation Policy be developed and implemented for the 4 social housing landlords in Anglesey.
- 4.3 Members will need training on the new Housing Allocation Policy. In addition, Members elected in May 2013 will also require training. We have already scheduled this training within the Members training programme post May 2013.

5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 Members of the Standards Committee are invited to make observations on the report.

Number of visits/calls logged	1378	
*Number of reception visits	361	Incomplete data
**Number of phone calls	422	Incomplete data
Number of Letters	1	Incomplete data
Number of e-mails	6	Incomplete data

% calls dealt with at first contact 66%

Nature of visits/calls

		No calls forwarded
GE - General Enquiry	470	125
C - Complaint	13	4
HRA - housing register advice	218	9
L - Lettings	184	69
HA - homelessness advice	97	80
HR - homelessness referral	45	37
R - rents	226	79
RA - rent arrears	37	29
PL -Private Leasing	22	13
TP - tenant participation	11	0
EMO - estate management	46	21
EH - empty homes	5	5
AH - affordable homes	4	2
Total:	1378	473

	No calls	Dealt with on 1st contact
Awst/August 2012	318	52%
Medi/Setember 2012	829	69%
Hydref/October 2012 (to date)	231	80%
Total:	1378	

Housing Register Applications

Applications Received	188	Incomplete data
Applications returned (lack of supporting paperwork)	44	Incomplete data
Acknowledged within 5 working days		Incomplete data
Points letter sent within 30 working days		Incomplete data

* recording of reception visits commenced 06/08/12

** recording of telephone calls commenced 06/09/12