

**Report to  
Housing Tenancy Board**

Date: **18 March 2013**

Report of: **Director of Community**

Subject: **HOMESWAPPER SCHEME - AN UPDATE**

**SUMMARY**

This report provides Board members with an update on the Council's participation with HomeSwapper a nationwide exchange scheme following an initial 12 month period.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That Board members note the contents of the report and endorse the proposal that the Council continues to subscribe to HomeSwapper.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. A presentation and report was made to Board members on 29 March 2012 regarding the HomeSwapper scheme when it was endorsed that the Council should sign up to the scheme for an initial 12 month period. This was ratified by the Council's Executive in April 2012.
2. As previously reported to the Board, in November 2011 the Government issued a new statutory direction to the social housing regulator. Under this direction the regulator was required to set a standard relating to methods of assisting tenants to exchange tenancies and in particular to facilitate the provision of access to an internet-based mutual exchange service.
3. This standard promotes registered providers such as the Council to subscribe to an internet-based mutual exchange service which allows tenants to:-
  - (a) Register an interest in exchanging their home without payment of a fee;
  - (b) Enter their current property details and their requirements for the property they hope to obtain through an exchange and;
  - (c) Access details of properties that meet their requirements

## **HOMESWAPPER SCHEME**

4. HomeSwapper run by Housing Partners is the market leader in terms of offering a Mutual Exchange service to registered providers and tenants.
5. Approximately 780 landlords have signed up to HomeSwapper. This represents over 73% of social housing tenants in the UK on a single database, increasing tenants housing options.
6. The key benefits of HomeSwapper include:
  - a) Offers enhanced tenant choice;
  - b) Moves those in urgent need of re-housing;
  - c) Improves occupancy;
  - d) Increases stock utilisation;
  - e) Reduces void costs;
  - f) Provision of management information;
  - g) Mutual exchange and
  - h) Is accessible to all free of charge
7. In addition to the above benefits HomeSwapper is easy to use for both tenants and staff reducing both admin costs and bureaucracy associated with the Council maintaining its own exchange register.
8. Furthermore it is possible for the Council to process exchange applications online.

## FINDINGS SO FAR

9. The number of tenants who have registered onto HomeSwapper since April 2012 together with information as to whether they are under-occupying or overcrowding their current home is shown in the table below:

<b>Total number of Tenants registered within last 12 months</b>	<b>Number of Tenants who are under-occupying their current homes</b>	<b>Number of Tenants who are in accommodation too small for their needs</b>	<b>Number who wish to move to similar sized accommodation as they currently occupy</b>
<b>83</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>58</b>

10. Although the current number of tenants that are registered on HomeSwapper appears low the Council have to date not broadly publicised or marketed the service. The intention is to increase publicity in the future by way of electronic advert on plasma screen about HomeSwapper in the Council's main reception together with the display of posters and leaflets.
11. The number of exchanges which have taken place since April 2012 is shown in the table below:

<b>Total number of Tenants who have exchanged properties</b>	<b>Number of Tenants who had been under occupying their home</b>	<b>Number of Tenants who had been in accommodation too small for their needs</b>	<b>Number of Tenants who moved to similar sized accommodation</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

12. HomeSwapper includes access to a 'Performance Dashboard' which provides some useful information relating to take up in Fareham. An extract copy of this is shown in Appendix A for the board's information.

## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

13. The annual fee for HomeSwapper in 2013/14 providing the minimum (bronze) service is £4,295. This fee includes a 'Rightsize' module which helps target under and over occupation cases; this was previously charged separately.
14. In 2012/13 the average void costs are approximately £2395 per property. Assuming that a tenant exchanges their property with another housing list applicant which results in them both being adequately housed the Council would potentially recoup the cost of annual subscription to HomeSwapper.

15. Aside from the fact that an exchange can help relieve pressure on void repair budgets, it can also help relieve pressure on the housing waiting list for some applicants who are already residing in social housing.
16. An exchange can also help those tenants that are currently under-occupying their home who will be affected by the reduction in housing benefit from April 2013 find a home that better meets their housing needs.
17. If the Council were no longer to continue membership with HomeSwapper but instead offer reimbursement for Council tenants wishing to register, the cost equivalent compared to annual membership would only fund a limited number of tenants. Under a fully-funded scheme all approved tenants would be able to access this service.
18. At present the cost of HomeSwapper is funded from the budget used to encourage under-occupation transfers. It is proposed that this budget be used for future participation with HomeSwapper.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

19. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

### **CONCLUSION**

20. This report has provided the board with performance information in regard to the HomeSwapper scheme and further outlined the benefits to the Council and its tenants of remaining in the scheme in the future.

**Appendices:**            [Appendix A](#) - Performance Information

**Background Papers:**   None

**Reference Papers:**    HomeSwapper Scheme - Report to Housing Tenancy Board  
29 March 2012

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Jane Cresdee, Senior Housing Management Officer (Ext 4483)