

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

**Date** 13 July 2023

**Report of:** Head of Housing Delivery

**Subject:** Update on the Housing Register

#### SUMMARY

This report provides information to Members regarding the Council's housing register, its recent review, and ongoing monitoring of new affordable housing delivery.

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel considers the contents of this report and comment or raise any points for further clarification.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. In 2020 the Housing team began the implementation of Civica. This new software would bring together all the areas of the department; the housing register being a key element of this. During the early stages of the project plan, it was identified that the register had applicants listed that had not been in contact for several years. Gaps in information were also noted. To ensure the new system only held relevant and accurate records the team began a review of the register.
2. This report details the method and outcome of the review, including up to date statistics which help inform the Council's own affordable housing delivery projects, and what officers ask of developers through the planning system.

## **THE APPLICANT'S HOUSING JOURNEY**

3. Before detailing the review of the register, it is important to understand how it sits within the customer's journey to affordable housing. When households or individuals first find themselves (or are at risk of) becoming homeless they contact the Housing Options team. They have an informal session where they discuss their current circumstances, affordability and needs to understand what options are available to them.
4. Depending on what is discussed, the customer is given one of several options. They may be guided towards alternative accommodation, given assistance to stay in their current home, placed in temporary accommodation, or added to the housing register. As the different outcomes are complex, this report will only focus on the housing register route.
5. Applicants are prioritised on the waiting list based on their needs. If they need rehoming immediately then they may be placed as 'urgent', otherwise they are placed in a 'high', 'medium' or 'low' category. There are multiple reasons why a household may be placed in each band and each of these are based on legislation and detailed in the Council's adopted Allocations Policy.
6. As properties become available, the Allocations Officer will offer it to the highest priority and most suitable applicant. When customers join the housing register, part of the information collected also includes preference on area, number of bedrooms required and additional requirements such as disabled adaptations. Civica matches the details of the property against these bespoke needs so officers can identify the most suitable applicant. Further discussion and progress will then take place to enable the customer to move into the home.

## **THE REVIEW**

7. Having up to date and precise records ensures that the matches are accurate. It also prevents time being wasted for both customers and officers. The capabilities of Civica compared to the previous register are also much more powerful; moving to this new software means that officers can collect relevant information leading to better housing matches.
8. It also means that the risk of out-of-date information being held is reduced. Previously, officers found that households' circumstances had changed, but the Council was not informed. The time and resources needed to undertake an annual review is immense. Unfortunately, the day-to-day tasks and other projects had to take priority (particularly during the Covid pandemic). The implementation of Civica provided the opportunity to

review the housing register and update missing or inaccurate information. Migrating inaccurate data would prove to be more time consuming than undertaking a review. It also gave households the opportunity to 'check in' with officers and to discuss their changing needs.

9. Due to the sensitive nature of the review, it was important that it was undertaken carefully and considerately. We did not want to simply remove applicants because we had not heard from them. The process was broken down into several steps:
  - a) An initial letter was sent inviting online applicants to complete an online form. If they did not have internet access, a phone number was included to allow the applicant to contact the team to complete the questions.
  - b) If there was no response, the team double checked the contact details against the Council's records. A second letter was then sent to non-responders.
  - c) If there was still no response, officers phoned the applicant (making multiple attempts).
  - d) If the team were still unable to contact the applicant, a letter was sent to advise they had been removed from the housing register.
10. The team chose an online form because of the volume of applicants on the housing register – 1165 at that time. It would have been a resource intensive task to call every household. By writing to applicants initially officers could focus on individuals who needed more support and/or had no access to the internet.
11. After the initial contact, 332 applicants required a second letter. The number of final phone calls that needed to be made were 48.
12. At the start of the review, there were 1165 applicants on the housing register. Once the review had concluded, this had reduced to 513.
13. Another outcome of this project was the implementation of a rolling evaluation of the housing register. Civica is able to generate a review based on the date the applicant was added. This means that officers can produce reviews as they are due, rather than having to find resources annually.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

14. Based on analysis of the current housing register (circa 500 customers), Appendix A shows the indicative areas of demand that are used to inform new developments. This is used for both Council schemes and the affordable housing mix on planning applications from private developers<sup>1</sup>. The basic data used is the areas households prefer to live in. A deeper dive into the data looks at the number of bedrooms required, the need for sheltered schemes, adaptations required, and how long households have been waiting.
15. The data from the Housing Register has informed all of the Council's recent developments. For example, Queens Road provided the opportunity to build bespoke homes for those requiring wheelchair access. The properties at Capella Close are shared ownership as the findings show that Hill Head is a lower need area for Social/Affordable Rent homes. The team will continue to use this information to ensure

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<sup>1</sup>The data used is on the Council's website at: [https://www.fareham.gov.uk/housing/looking\\_for\\_a\\_home/affordablehousingneed.aspx](https://www.fareham.gov.uk/housing/looking_for_a_home/affordablehousingneed.aspx)

appropriate developments occur.

16. The following graph shows the most recent analysis of the Housing Register. The totals are shown as a percentage as applicants are able to choose more than one area of preference. Sheltered housing is excluded as this will be detailed in the emerging Sheltered Housing Strategy.

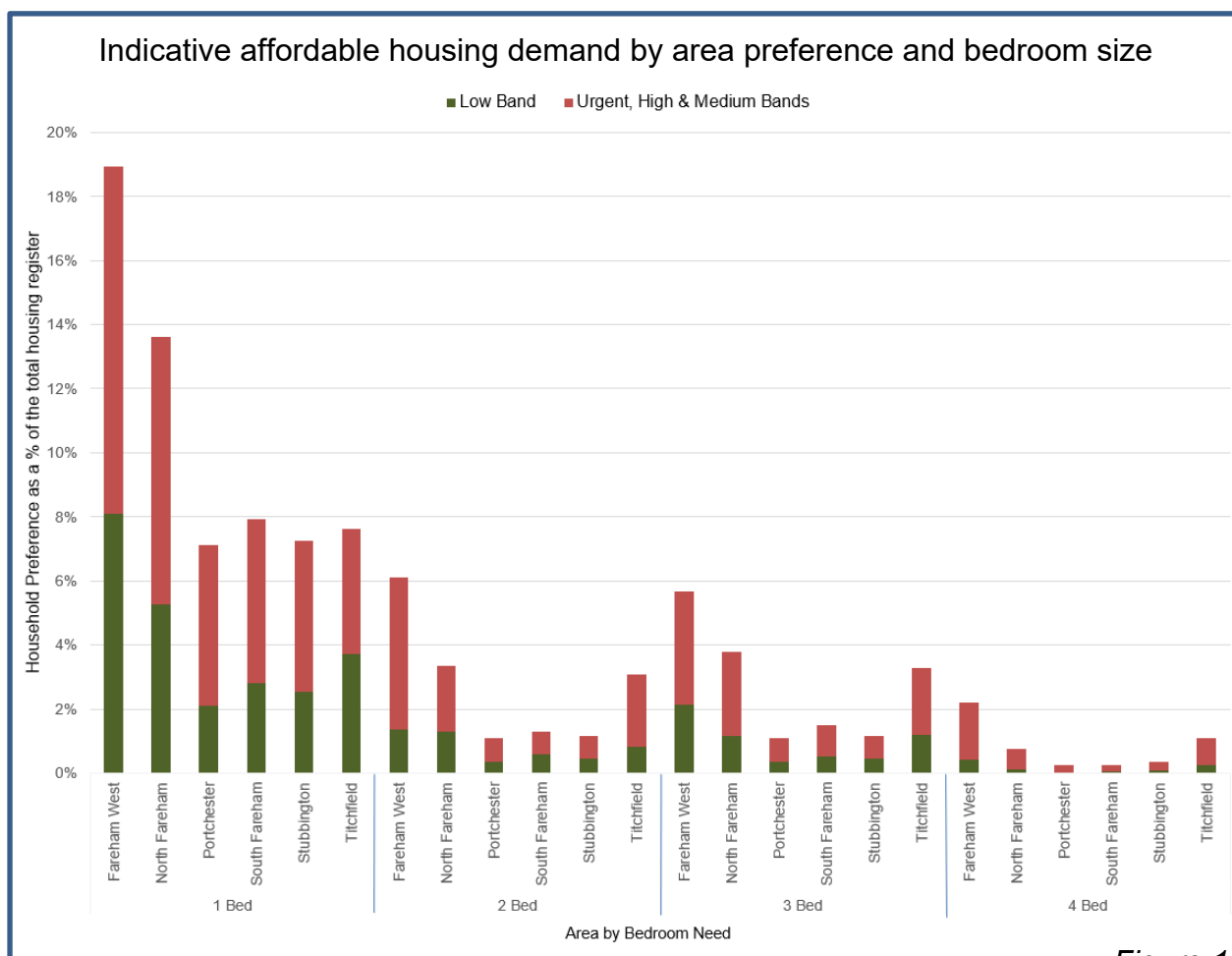


Figure 1

17. The graph shows that the most popular area of need is in Fareham West for one-bedroom properties. This is very different to previous statistics, but the change can be partly attributed to the housing register review. In addition, Fareham West is a larger area compared to Portchester, for example, and differs in its urbanity.
18. It is clear that the greatest need is focused on 1-bedroom properties. However, we know that households are also waiting longer for larger, family sized accommodation. Taking all this information into account, officers check the detail of the statistics thoroughly before commenting on any proposed new developments, thereby employing a qualitative as well as quantitative understanding of the need. The graph shown here is a simple example of what the data indicates.
19. Welborne will also be added to the areas applicants can choose from in the coming weeks.

### FORTHCOMING AFFORDABLE HOME DELIVERY

20. In addition to developing an in-depth understanding of the affordable housing need in the Borough, officers also collect data and information about the new affordable

housing which is expected to get built in the Borough in the years ahead. This information is collected from planning approvals/applications and the anticipated completion on site.

21. This information allows officers to monitor how new affordable home delivery integrates with the need on the Housing Register.
22. New affordable home delivery across the Borough had been low for several years, with matters such as nitrate neutrality previously impacting the number of new dwellings permitted through the planning system in a significant way. As officers had predicted, we are now in the early stages of seeing an upward trend in the number of new affordable homes provided across the Borough, as articulated in Figure 2 below.
23. The below graph includes all affordable homes delivered or anticipated to be delivered. A proportion of these affordable homes will therefore be Shared Ownership properties (which are not for customers on the housing waiting list).

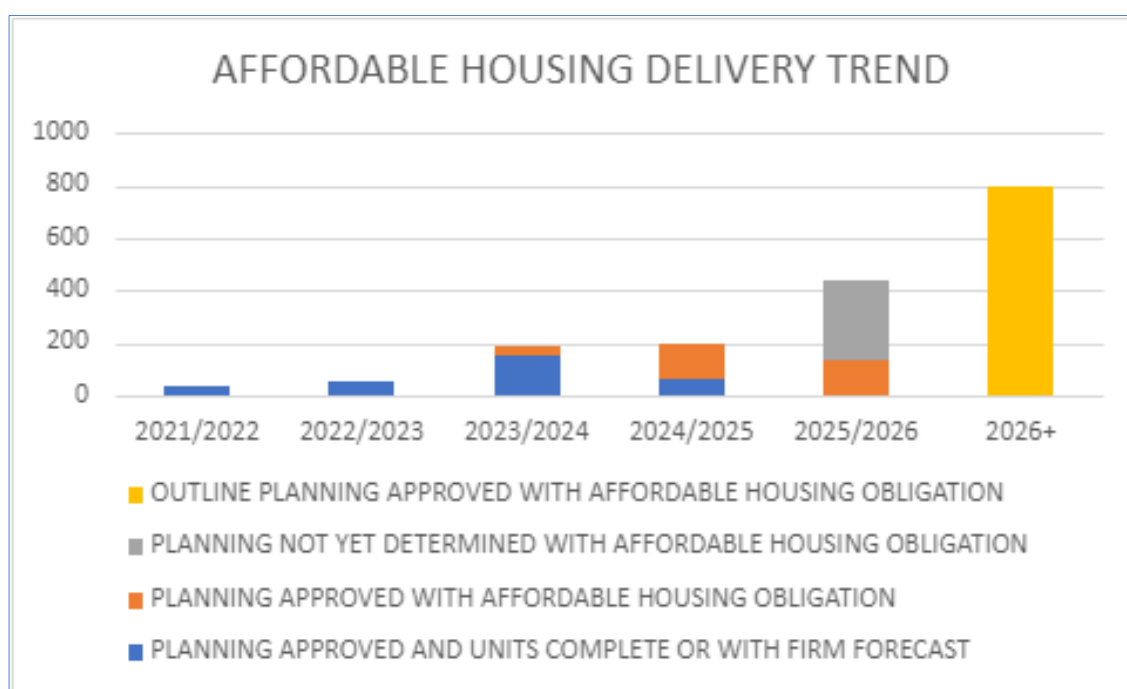


Figure 2

24. Officers will continue to monitor and look at how the need aligns with supply; this will include further analysis of the anticipated new affordable homes by area of the Borough. At this stage the increasing supply is hugely positive as we seek to provide homes for the customers on the housing register, and with awareness of potential increasing customer need for affordable housing due to wider landscape changes principally connected with the cost-of-living crisis.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

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

## CONCLUSION

26. The review of the Housing Register has enabled significant improvements to helping vulnerable households into affordable housing. By capturing accurate and detailed information, officers can understand the most appropriate housing route for applicants.

27. The Civica system will further aid officers in ensuring details are up to date. By having a review based on the annual acceptance to the register for each applicant, officers are not burdened by an overwhelming, resource intensive task each year.

28. Officers will continue to monitor the data on affordable housing need and projected delivery of affordable homes to ensure that we can help best meet the needs of customers.

**Appendices:**        **A:** Indicative areas of demand for Social/Affordable Rent housing need

**Background Papers:**        None

**Reference Papers:**        None

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Fleur Allaway (01329 824304).

## APPENDIX A

Indicative areas of demand for Social/Affordable Rent housing need:

