

**Report to:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 14<sup>th</sup> June 2012

**Lead Member/Officer:** Lead Member for Customers and Communities/Head of Housing Services

**Report Authors:** Project Officer and Housing Strategy Officer

**Title:** Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH)

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**1. What is the report about?**

The report updates members on the development of a Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) across the North East Wales sub region, and seeks members' views on the draft Common Allocations Framework (CAF) before proceeding to public consultation.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1 To update members on the progress made with the SARTH collaborative project and provide an opportunity to influence the future direction it takes.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1 For members to consider the information provided and make recommendations to inform the future direction of the project.

**4. Report details**

SARTH (Single Access Route to Housing) is a partnership project between all the major social landlords in north east Wales, covering the local authority areas of Conwy County Borough, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham County Borough.

The partners are Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Cartrefi Conwy, Clwyd Alyn Housing association, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, North Wales Housing and Wales and West Housing.

The overall aim of SARTH is to provide a common access route to a range of affordable housing options which is transparent, legal, efficient and accessible to all sections of the community.

This report presents a draft common allocations framework (CAF). The draft has three points outstanding which need to be settled before

consultation. These are set out in the appendix to the attached briefing. The CAF would achieve the aim of streamlining the application and allocations service for customers in Denbighshire and other participating counties, meaning that people would apply once to be prioritised by all social landlords in the county in a consistent way.

### **Key elements of the Draft Common Allocations Framework (CAF)**

- Housing need will be assessed uniformly across the region, providing fairness and consistency to the customer, taking into account people's individual needs and expressed preferences. The definition of housing need is based on the legal concept of reasonable preference. The approach adopted makes use of the further legal powers to prioritise with applicants entitled to reasonable preference according to local connection and urgent need.
- Partners share one register and so an applicant need make only one application to access the whole system. Each partner with properties in an area chosen by an applicant will be aware of the application and able to give the applicant the appropriate priority in the allocation process.
- The draft allocations framework adopts a banding scheme to prioritise people in housing need, following the legal principles regarding reasonable preference, additional preference and local connection.
- When a vacancy becomes available, applicants who have expressed a preference for the area and whose household is suitable for the property type are shortlisted. Applicants are ranked on this shortlist by their band, with those in band one given highest priority and so on. Applicants within the same band are ranked according to date of application, with those who have been waiting longest given highest priority.
- Further details are provided on the CAF in Appendix A and the project generally in Appendix B.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1 The project links directly into the following corporate priorities:

- Responding to demographic change
- Regeneration.

Other benefits to the community include:

- Customer focus approach – improving service delivery with a single contact point and early realistic housing options advice

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1 The project has secured the following funding:

- £63,077 in Social Housing Management Grant from the Welsh Government
- £10,000 from Denbighshire Housing Services and £45,000 from other partners to date
- Denbighshire Housing Services is committed to contributing £10,000 per year for the next 3 financial years
- Partners are committed to contributing £135,000 over the next 3 financial years
- We are awaiting the outcome of a bid to Welsh Government for further funding.

## **7. What consultations have been carried out?**

7.1 A variety of consultative mechanisms are utilised including:

- Project steering group – all partners represented
- Project working group – all partners represented
- Regular reports to the committees of the Local Authorities and Housing Association Boards
- Welsh Government
- Welsh Local Government Association, Community Housing Cymru and Chartered Institute of Housing

## **8. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

8.1 The risks for each project are monitored and evaluated regularly as part of the project management approach.

## **9. Power to make the Decision**

9.1 Section 167 of the Homelessness Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 relates to allocations.

9.2 Article 6 of the Council's Constitution

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