

Report of:	Meeting	Date
David McArthur (Housing Services Manager)	Overview and Scrutiny	21 st October 2019

Update on My Home Choice Fylde Coast

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To provide an update to the committee on the progress to date of the new My Home Choice system for letting social housing.

2. Background

2.1 MyHomeChoice is the Choice Based lettings (CBL) system across the Fylde Coast authorities of Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre. It provides a portal where all vacancies for social housing are advertised in one place and households can place bids for this accommodation. Properties are then allocated using a Consistent Assessment Policy for prioritising the housing need of applicants.

2.2 A review was undertaken of MyHomeChoice in 2016/17 which focussed on addressing issues of concern with the current Consistent Assessment Policy (CAP) raised by Registered Providers. These included addressing issues with delays in processing applications due to all applicants having to go through a full registration process, applicants losing a local connection if they move between boroughs and the system adopting a more flexible commercial approach to attract more households who would not necessarily have thought they would be eligible for social housing.

2.3 The principle changes were as follows:

1. Revised local connection requirement giving applicants access to the register if they can demonstrate a three year residency within Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre. However priority will still be given to Blackpool residents for Blackpool homes, Fylde residents for Fylde homes, and Wyre residents for Wyre homes.
2. At least 50% of homes, including those in the shortest supply, are available to people with a Banding priority for re-housing, Bands A-

C. The rest of the homes will be available to everyone on the list and offered on a first come first served basis (but still giving priority to Blackpool residents for Blackpool homes, Fylde residents for Fylde homes, and Wyre residents for Wyre homes).

3. Simplification of the priority bands for people with a legally defined housing need. There are now three bands A, B and C. There will be no bands given to households who do not have a housing need defined in law, but they will be able to bid for accommodation on a first come first served basis (subject to Borough priority). The criteria for each of the bands is set out in Appendix 1.
4. Restrictions on the use of the system by existing social housing tenants looking to transfer. Transfer applicants will only be able to access the housing register, if they have a banding priority for re-housing.
5. Priority given to people in paid or voluntary work by slightly increasing the chances for access to social housing for working applicants. 20% of homes made available on a first come first served basis will be offered with priority to people in paid or voluntary work.
6. Flexibility in the sizes of properties that applicants can bid for by allowing households where the rent is affordable to be able to get a home with an extra bedroom.

2.4 The proposed changes were discussed by a task group on 25th July 2018 and subsequently approved by Cabinet on the 5th September 2018 and it was recommended a further update on the progress of the Consistent Assessment Policy of MHC within Wyre be provided to this Committee within 12 months.

3. Key issues

3.1 In January 2019 My Home Choice brought about changes to the way that Housing Association properties were allocated. Reducing the banding categories from A-F to A-C and including a “No Band/ No Need” category for the households who were not homeless or at threat of homelessness. See Fact sheet that explains who will be given a banding, by accessing the following link [MyHomeChoice Quick Guide](#), also available in Appendix 2 of this report.

3.2 All available properties are now being split down the middle into two categories, My Home Need for households allocated a priority banding for rehousing and My Home Choice for the “No Band” Households. Households allocated a banding on My Home Need still have access to the full housing register from both the Need and No Need category. The following report will highlight how these changes have had an effect on the housing register since January 2019.

3.3 Table 1 details the number of households with a local connection to Wyre who are active on the Housing register and able to bid. This shows a slight increase in applicants throughout 2018 with the number of applicants registered in 2019 decreasing slightly due to a data cleanse of the system to remove applicants who had been inactive for a significant time. The number of transfer applicants has fallen and this will be as a result of households already housed in social housing being unable to transfer, unless they have a housing need to do so and awarded a priority banding. Registered Providers report that since the implementation of the changes in January 2019 there have been no significant delays in the processing and accessing of applications to join the Housing Register.

Table 1: Analysis of MHC for residents with a local connection to Wyre

Application Status	No. applicants on 30 th June 2018	No applicants on 31 st December 2018	No. applicants on 30 th June 2019
All active applicants	1903	2026	2007
Of which are transfer applicants	412 (21.7%)	413 (20.4%)	241 (12%)

3.4 Table 2 gives the breakdown for households with an active application who have been awarded a banding priority. The 2018 data is shown by banding as per the previous allocation scheme; the 2019 data shows the allocated bandings as per the new allocation scheme. The numbers shown in red highlight those bands with a defined housing need under that allocation scheme.

3.5 The changes were intended to speed up the registration process and allow households on both the “No Need” stream (MyHomeChoice) and “Need” stream (MyHomeNeed) to have a higher chance of securing accommodation. The data in Table 2 shows that households with a priority banding now take 511 of the total active applicants (25.5%), a reduction of 8.5% from 2018.

3.6 This will be explained by the reduction in priority bandings from A to C and households choosing not to complete a full application and being able to access the “no need” accommodation quickly despite not being awarded a priority banding.

Table 2: Breakdown of banding awarded to active households

	No. active applicants on 30 th June 2018	No. active applicants on 31 st December 2018	No. active applicants on 30 th June 2019
A	9	8	7
B	273	301	180

C	10	9	324
D	359	371	N/A
E	317	328	N/A
F	933	1007	N/A
No Band	2	2	1496
Number in Housing Need	651 (34.2%)	689 (34%)	511 (25.5%)
Total	1903	2026	2007

3.7 The data from 30th June 2019 shows highlights that there is a far greater number of applicants in Band C than the previous year. This is due to Bands C and D combining and Band D being removed. Band E and Band F have also been removed resulting in an increase in the number of applicants without a priority band.

3.8 Table 3 analyses the number of active applicants that are employed or undertaking voluntary work on the register during 2018 and on 30th June 2019. Under the new allocations scheme applicants who are not in housing need and are working, employed or voluntary, now become part of the “No Band/No Need” group and cannot bid for accommodation through the “Need” stream.

3.9 Whilst the percentage of working applicants remained consistent prior to the new system, there has been an increase from 24.1% to 29.6% since the system changes in January 2019. One of the reasons for updating the system was to encourage more working households to register on the system and to give them more chance of successfully bidding for properties through the introduction of the “no need” stream.

Table 3: Active applicants that are employed

	No. applicants on 30th June 2018	No applicants on 31st December 2018	No. applicants on 30th June 2019
Total no. active applicants	1903	2026	2007
No. active applicants employed	458	488	594
% active applicants employed	24.1	24.1	29.6

3.10 The Fylde Coast Housing Partnership agreed that at least 50% of properties must be let through the “Need” stream and no more than 50% through the “No Need” stream. Unfortunately due to problems with the

reporting system we do not have data available on lettings for this report but feedback from processing partners suggests this is happening as expected with no concerns raised.

- 3.11** The partnership also set out to retain the target of two thirds of all properties being let to applicants with a defined housing need. Processing partners understand that this target is being met and will check this once lettings data becomes available.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1** The changes implemented were to address issues raised by registered providers around delays in processing applications due to all applicants having to go through a full registration process, applicants losing a local connection if they move between boroughs and the system adopting a more flexible commercial approach to attract more households in employment or voluntary work, who would not necessarily have thought they would be eligible for social housing.

- 4.2** An analysis undertaken on the data available to date does show that the implemented changes are addressing those initial concerns:

1. Feedback from processing partners (within Wyre this is Regenda Homes) is that there have been no significant delays in the processing and assessment of applicants eligible for priority banding for rehousing. Wyre Council and Regenda work in partnership to fast track the assessment of applications presenting to Wyre Council Housing Options and facing homelessness.
2. From December to January 18/19 the register was inactive to new applicants while changes the system were applied. As a result housing register since December 2018 has remained fairly static with 2007 active applicants registered.
3. The number of transfer applicants has fallen with existing housing association tenants only being able to register if they have been awarded a priority banding.
4. The percentage of applicants in employment has increased from 24.1% to 29.6% since 31st December 2018.
5. The changes were expected to reduce the number of households in priority banding categories, speeding up the registration process and allow households on both the “Need” and “No Need” streams to have higher chance of securing accommodation. The data in Table 2 shows that households with a priority banding now take up 25.5% of the total active applicants, a reduction of 8.5% since December 2018.

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List of appendices

Appendix 1 – Priority Bandings

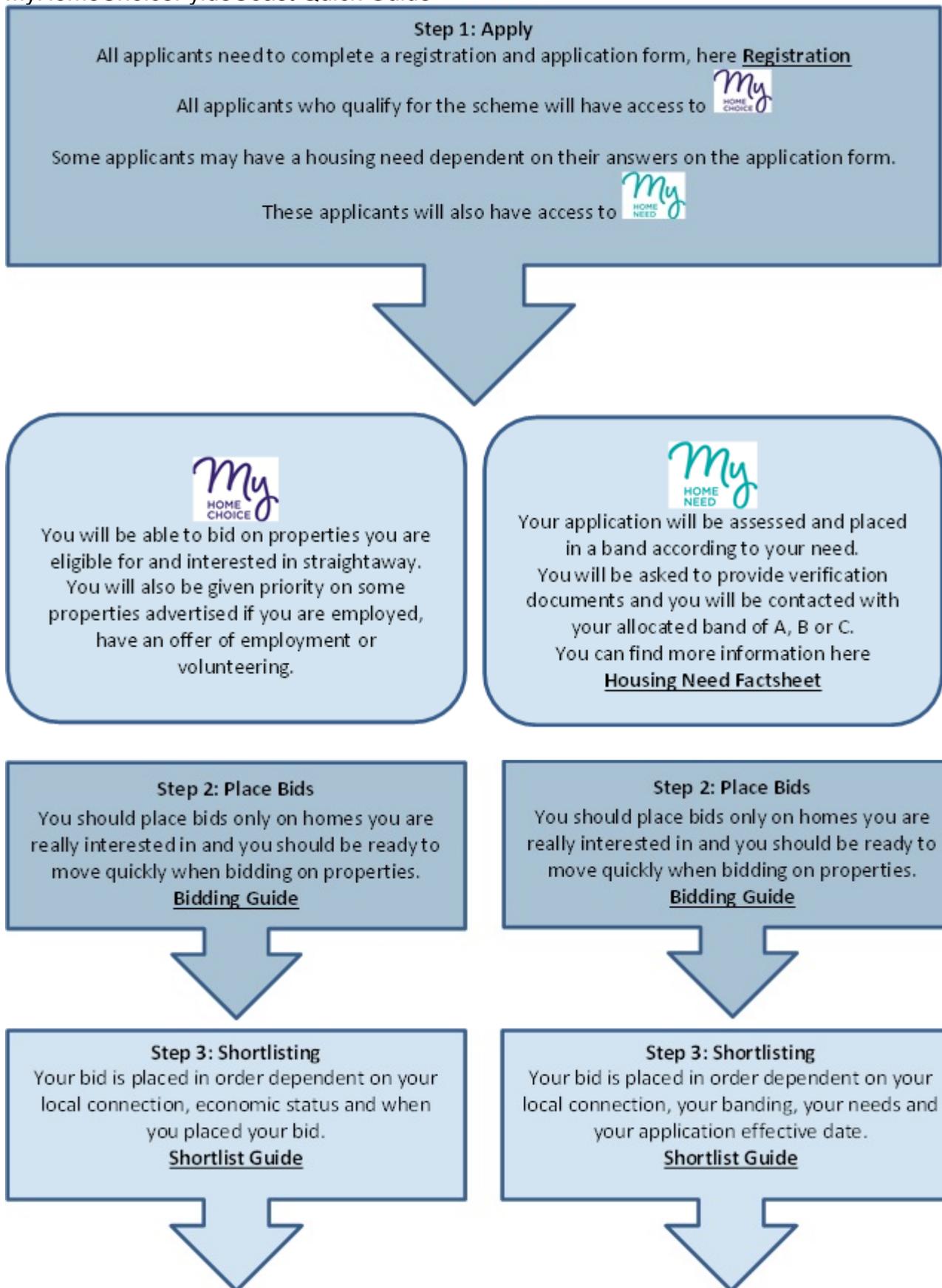
Appendix 2 – MyHomeChoice Fylde Coast Quick Guide

Appendix 1
Priority Bands

Housing Register	Needs	Criteria for Each Band
A		<p>Homeless applicants who Blackpool, Fylde or Wyre Council must provide with housing under a statutory duty</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Applicants with a local connection and at least one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A vulnerable person who faces imminent discharge from hospital or temporary residential care and for whom there is no suitable accommodation to return to; • Applicants in exceptional circumstances including those in immediate danger of violence (at discretion).
B		<p>Applicants with a local connection and one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrepair in current property with identified Category 1 hazard where the landlord has failed to take the required action; • Existing social housing tenant of a Partner Organisation who requires the property to be demolished or vacated; • Under occupancy of a property owned by a Partner Organisation (applicable after the start of a tenancy); • Living in an adapted property, owned by a Partner Organisation, no longer required; • Needs to move due to urgent medical or disability reasons, exacerbated due to current property conditions, with a medical assessment supporting the applicants (including household members) need to be rehoused; • Armed forces personnel, currently serving or have served in the last 5 years (who meet at least one criteria from Band C); • Urgent social or welfare needs, for example: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Admission into residential care or hospital if applicant is not rehoused 2. A dependent (under 16) will be accommodated by the Local Authority unless the applicant is rehoused into a suitable property 3. The need to give or receive essential care and support; • At risk of serious harm in present accommodation, for example, domestic abuse, hate crime, anti-social behaviour or witnesses of crime;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threatened with homelessness, or owed the initial homelessness statutory duty by Blackpool, Fylde or Wyre Council; • Property unintentionally overcrowded and in need of at least two additional bedrooms; • Leaving Local Authority Care, with appropriate tenancy support, where there is a statutory duty under the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 to provide housing; • Rough Sleeping, threatened with or have a history of rough sleeping who are supported and referred by Blackpool, Fylde or Wyre Local Authority Housing Teams; • Leaving supported housing or rehabilitation accommodation and are ready for independent living with tenancy support (if required) in place.
C	<p>Applicants with a local connection and one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical or disability conditions (with no detrimental impact) with a medical assessment supporting the applicants need to be rehoused; • Social or Welfare needs, for example, applicant requires to be rehoused to a particular area to avoid hardship to themselves or others; • Disrepair in current property with identified Category 2 hazard where the landlord has failed to take the required action; • Property unintentionally overcrowded and in need of one additional bedroom; • Homeless with no priority need and no statutory duty owed by Blackpool, Fylde or Wyre Council; • In supported or rehabilitation accommodation and not ready for independent living and no tenancy support in place; • Armed forces personnel currently serving or have served in the last five years.

Appendix 2 MyHomeChoiceFyldeCoast Quick Guide



Step 4: Offer
The property landlord will contact you to make you your provisional offer. You can only be on offer for one property at a time.
Our Partners



Step 5: Provide Documents
The landlord will conduct pre-tenancy checks. You will need to provide the landlord with your documents and ID within 3 days to continue with your offer. **Documents Required**



Step 6: View and Accept
The landlord will contact you to arrange an internal viewing of the property. All Social Housing Properties are unfurnished. For further information see our **Guide to Viewings**



Step 7: Sign Up
If you like the property and pass the checks you will be advised when the property is ready for your sign up appointment. You may have to pay some rent up front. **Sign Up Guide**



Step 8: Moving In
You are responsible for your rent from the day you receive your keys and you will need to set up how you will pay your rent. You will need to have arranged your removals and cooker reconnection at your new property. You will need to set up your utility accounts. For more information see our **Moving In Guide**

Step 4: Offer
The property landlord will contact you to make you your provisional offer. You can only be on offer for one property at a time.
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Step 7: Sign Up
If you like the property and pass the checks you will be advised when the property is ready for your sign up appointment. You may have to pay some rent up front. **Sign Up Guide**



Step 8: Moving In
You are responsible for your rent from the day you receive your keys and you will need to set up how you will pay your rent. You will need to have arranged your removals and cooker reconnection at your new property. You will need to set up your utility accounts. For more information see our **Moving In Guide**