

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 17 JANUARY 2017

ENHANCEMENT OF THE HOUSING OPTIONS WIZARD

REPORT BY VIVIEN SMITH, HEAD OF PLANNING AND PLACE

ABSTRACT

This proposal aims to enhance the functionality of the existing Housing Options Wizard by updating the housing options products and information presented in the customer's personalised housing options plan and presenting the customer with live examples of private lets that meet their housing requirements.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Approves the work required to update the Housing Options Wizard pathways and products.
- (ii) Approves the enhancement of the existing Housing Options Wizard to include examples of available private lets where these would meet the customer's housing needs.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/COPORATE PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

- Angus is a good place to live in, work in and visit
- Individuals and families are involved in decisions which affect them

3. BACKGROUND

Home Connections worked with us to create a bespoke, self-serve localised housing options wizard, which went live to customers in March 2013. It is designed to use conditional logic to take each user down a custom path, providing relevant housing options advice dependant on the information they input.

It includes tool tip text and useful links throughout the form and each customer is provided a personal housing options plan that can include advice on: social rented housing, including stock and turnover of their preferred locations and house types and information on how to apply; advice on private rented options; low cost home ownership options; sheltered and supported housing; how to pay rent and obtain benefits; financial advice services, employment and education services. It is also provides access to mutual exchange options and links directly into our House Exchange online service. The Housing Options Action Plan can be viewed by the customer on the site and a copy is emailed to them in a PDF format (see **Appendix 1** for example).

For customers in a crisis or homeless situation it redirects them to the Housing Options service for further advice.

Google Translate is built in so the whole form and all custom text is translatable.

4. CURRENT POSITION

The Housing Options products and pathways have not been updated since the online self-serve tool launched in 2013. As well as changes to our housing options service and the review of housing options available for older people, there have been changes in the external products available to housing options customers (e.g. assistance into home ownership).

Accessing the private rented sector is a relevant housing option for many customers. Currently a list of estate agents is presented to the user and if further assistance is required to explore available private lets, an appointment is set up with a Housing Officer (Housing Options).

5. PROPOSALS

To ensure the information produced is relevant and up to date, a new pathway is required to be built into the Wizard for Retirement Housing. In addition, the criteria for both sheltered housing and supported housing requires to be updated in the existing pathways. The information produced for the customers needs updated following the housing options service redesign in 2015 and there are new products under Low Cost Home Ownership to be added.

This proposal also aims to enhance the existing functionality of the Housing Options Wizard by publishing available suitable private rented properties as part of the customer's housing options plan. The software change will lead to the extraction of private lets from the most commonly used websites, taking account of the customers housing requirements and area preferences. The pdf housing options plan generated for the customer will include a list of currently available private rented properties that day. To avoid a lengthy plan we will cap the size of the data to a snap shot of information (property description, rent charge, picture) and provide a link to allow the customer to go online to see the full advert.

This will enable customers to get a full appraisal of their available housing options and will mean staff time and resources are targeted to more vulnerable customers who need support.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Quote received from Home Connections to complete software changes and content additions for updates required (1.5 days) = £900

Quote received from Home Connections to enhance wizard to include suitable private rented properties:

Tasks	Time (days)	Costs £
Site and data analysis of the source website from which the data has to be scraped	2	600
Database design	2	600
Creating web crawler for different site pages	7.5	1,500
Insertion of data into database	2.5	750
Data verification & validation	5	1,500
Creating interface for viewing scraped data on housing options wizard	5	1,500
Project management	2	1,200
	Total	7,650
	Discount of 22.5%	1,721
	Total after discount	£5,929

The costs associated with the works will be met from the overall HRA Revenue Budget.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Housing Options Action Plan Example – current format