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<b>Subject:</b>	<b>TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF THE KENT HOMECHOICE HOUSING REGISTER</b>
<b>Meeting and Date:</b>	<b>Cabinet – 16 January 2023</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Mike Davis, Strategic Director (Finance and Housing)</b>
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>Councillor Derek Murphy, Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education</b>
<b>Decision Type:</b>	<b>Key Decision</b>
<b>Classification:</b>	<b>Unrestricted</b>

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**Purpose of the report:** To obtain Cabinet approval to suspend the housing register for one month from 1 June 2023 until 1 July 2023 or dates close to those so that the new IT system can be implemented.

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**Recommendation:**

- (a) To suspend the housing register for a period of one month so that the new housing options IT system can be implemented in Dover and across Kent.
- (b) To delegate authority to the Strategic Director (Finance and Housing), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Housing, Port Health, Skills and Education, to make future decisions, should the date for suspension of the register need to be any later than 1 June 2023.

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## 1. Summary

- 1.1 Kent Homechoice (KHC) is a partnership of 13 Local Authorities, 28 Housing Associations and KCC set up to provide a Kent wide choice-based lettings system and expanded to provide a housing options system. DDC are the lead authority.
- 1.2 In July 2022, Cabinet approved the award of the contract for the Kent wide housing options system to Huume. This new contract was signed and put in place with Huume on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The contract with our current system provider Locata finishes at the end of July 2023. Work is progressing to have the new system in place ahead of this contract end date.
- 1.3 So that we can switch from the Locata system to Huume ahead of July 2023, it is necessary to suspend the housing register to new applicants for a period of one month.

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The KHC Partnership was formed in 2006 to provide a choice-based lettings system for all of Kent, the partnership is made up of the 13 Kent & Medway Local Authorities, KCC and 28 Housing Associations that have stock in Kent. DDC have been the lead authority since 2015 and have recently offered the contract to provide the housing options systems to Kent and Medway from July 2023 to Huume.
- 2.2 The day to day running of the partnership is managed by the KHC Partnership Manager whose post is hosted by DDC. Decisions regarding the management are taken by the KHC Project Board which is made up of senior officers at each Local Authority, KCC and the larger Housing Associations.

- 2.3 So that the housing register and housing options systems can be moved from the Locata system to the Huume system, it is necessary to suspend the housing register for a period of one month.
- 2.4 We seek approval to suspend the housing register to new applications from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023 until 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023. This will provide officers across Kent and Medway with sufficient time to allocate and complete outstanding shortlists or move them to the new system. It will also provide time to assess the status and banding of new applications and to cleanse any additional data should this be required before a copy of the data is provided to us by Locata.
- 2.5 Locata will provide a copy of all the data held on their system on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023 and Huume will upload the required data into their system as soon as possible after this date. This will then provide Huume and Dover and Kent officers with a further two-week period to correct any issues caused by the data upload so that the housing register can be reopened up on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023.
- 2.6 Property adverts can be prepared on the Huume system from 16<sup>th</sup> June ready to be advertised on 1<sup>st</sup> July. This means that there will only be a two-week period where properties cannot be advertised.
- 2.7 If clients approach the housing register team and are considered to be vulnerable and in a high housing need, it will be possible for their applications to be added manually to the Huume system during the period that the housing register is suspended.
- 2.8 A communications plan will be developed and put in place to provide customers with sufficient warning of the suspension of the online application form and to provide staff with the correct messages and options to give to those contacting wishing to apply for housing during this month-long period.
- 2.9 If the system were not closed for the month-long period, the data that is extracted from Locata to Huume will not be fully up to date and accurate. There will be a time lag of a few days whilst data is uploaded to the Huume system which would then mean that the data of any new applicants applying during those few days would have to be manually transferred to the Huume system. It would also then prove to be challenging for officers to check through and update the new system whilst new applications also arrived into the system.

### **3. Identification of Options**

- 3.1 Option A: To suspend the housing register for a period of one month which will enable the officers within housing to have a short period of time where they complete outstanding shortlists and assess the banding of any recent applications so that clean and up to date data can be moved from Locata to Huume on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023.
- 3.2 This will then allow officers a two-week period to ensure that the data has loaded into the new Huume system correctly before the housing register re-opens to new applicants.
- 3.3 Option B: Would be not to suspend the housing register but to upload the data without shortlists having been completed or applications having been assessed. The risks are identified at 2.8 above.

### **4. Evaluation of Options**

- 4.1 Option A is the recommended option as this will enable the data that is transferred to be in a condition that is easier to upload to a new system and will reduce the number of errors that occur as a part of the data upload.
- 4.2 Option B is not recommended

### **5. Resource Implications**

5.1 There are no additional financial resource implications in suspending the housing register as the financing of the transition of the Housing Options system to Huume is within the existing budget as agreed at July cabinet.

6. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

6.1 There are no climate change or environmental implications.

7. **Corporate Implications**

7.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy have been consulted in the writing of this report and have no further comment to add.

7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report regarding the closure of the housing register for a data migration does not specifically highlight any equality implications and there is a process in place for high priority/vulnerable applications. In discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149'](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149)

7.4 Other Officers (as appropriate): Not applicable.

8. **Appendices**

Not applicable.

9. **Background Papers**

Kent Homechoice Cabinet Report of 4 July 2022

Contact Officer: Vicky Hodson, Kent Homechoice Partnership Manager