

## **BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

### **Report of the Assistant Director of Health and Housing to the Business Improvement Board**

#### **HOMETRACK**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To support the application for the purchase of Hometrack, housing intelligence system.

##### **2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Board:

- 2.1 Approve the purchase of Hometrack.

**Note:** In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

##### **3. Information, Issues and Options**

###### **3.1 Background**

3.1.1 The Council has been undertaking housing need surveys for a number of years based on legislative framework which requires Local Authorities to undertake an assessment of local need. The methodology for these assessments has evolved over a period of time and merged with other processes to form the current Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). Our last SHMA was carried out by a consultant in 2007 and incurs additional costs to have it updated although we have carried out desktop revisions within staffing resources within the housing team.

3.1.2 The need to understand the housing market is crucial in ensuring we have the right evidence base to support the housing and planning policies that the Council adopts to ensure land supply and infrastructure is delivered within the district.

###### **3.2 Issues**

3.2.1 We currently establish our evidence through a Housing Needs survey undertaken every five years by a consultant, the last of which was in 2007. This survey was carried out with Kings Lynn and West Norfolk BC and North Norfolk DC and cost ourselves £40,000. The information was tested through the public examination of the Local Development Framework and found 'sound'. However it is costly to undertake in year update of the data.

3.2.2 We have undertaken an internal update of the information which has been successful but only on some elements of the data as we do not have access and ability to access all data to fully update this information.

3.2.3 Like a number of authorities the housing team have been seeking solutions to ensure we have robust and up-to-date information to support the work that we undertake in respect of housing supply, land supply and negotiations for affordable housing.

3.2.4 The Hometrack system is a reliable source of housing intelligence collected for a wide range of data bases and updated on a far more regular basis than the housing team could achieve. It will enable the housing team to respond to changes in market conditions very quickly and ensure affordability is a majority part of negotiations

when assessing applications with planning colleagues for delivery within the District.

- 3.2.5 Delivery of new housing (private and affordable) will be a valuable commodity in future years with the New Homes Bonus. The ability of the Council to ensure that development continues is linked to ensuring appropriate viability assessments of sites are undertaken. This can only be supported with up-to-date robust data.

### 3.3 Options

- 3.3.1 The Hometrack system enables the Council to have access to data instantly which is regularly updated and reflects current market conditions. We have not sourced a similar on line system which is readily accessible to the Council. It is offered on an annual contract which will enable an annual review and ability to consider alternatives if they arise. It may be possible to access information on another Local Authority area and thus share the cost with South Holland, this is certainly the case for an immediate neighbouring authority.
- 3.3.2 Procuring regular updates through a consultant. This method would be a one, three or five year approach but would not provide up-to-date information but a snap shot in time. A survey every year would be in the region of £15,000 economies of scale are achieved by undertaking over a longer period of time.
- 3.3.3 Use officer expertise to undertake a collation of data. This could be undertaken within staff resources but would require investment in analytical skills and some cost to purchase information from some sources. The information is likely to be challenged more by developers on its robustness.

### 3.4 Reasons for Recommendation(s)

- 3.4.1 The purchase of Hometrack is proposed as the best option for the delivery of up-to-date and robust information to support the activities of the Housing team.

### Background Papers

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*not on Forward Plan]*

#### Appendices attached to this report:

*BISC application form*