Response to Key Questions

Item 5. Impact of the Cyber Attack on the Housing Register

Housing Needs

| What impact has the cyber attack had on the housing register, and what has been put in place to mitigate the risks to residents in need? | **Impact of the Cyber attack** -

Loss of the old Universal Housing system - At the time of the cyber attack all applicants already assessed and eligible for the housing register with a bidding number were still able to bid for advertised properties. The advertising and bidding process is managed through a separate IT system hosted by LB Newham (Novalet) which remained unaffected by our cyber attack.

However the loss of Universal Housing removed the ability to process new applications to the register and changes in circumstances for existing applicants. With waiting times of many years the immediate impact on residents of this has been minimal as those applications / changes would have had a banding date that placed the residents behind other residents who were already on the housing register. There has, however, been a very understandable sense of frustration for residents waiting to have applications / changes processed as residents place great value on being able to bid, even if their prospects of making a successful bid are minimal.

While the work to rebuild our systems has been taking place the service has been collecting resident information for those who wish to apply and those who have had changes so that they could be directed to the appropriate process as soon as they became available (details below).

For existing applicants who have had a change in circumstances and where they have a band date old enough to put them near to successful bidding it has been possible to make manual changes to Novalet that would allow them to bid for appropriately sized property. As a manual process it would not be practical or desirable to intervene in this way for all cases.

The absence of an IT system has resulted in a backlog of applications, assessments and changes to process, these are detailed in the work plan below. The service is ensuring that residents are assigned banding dates based on when they approached the Council |

	to make an application / advise of updates - this will ensure that all residents have the correct priority on the housing register and are not disadvantaged.
	Development of a replacement IT system -

The Service is developing an in-house IT system to manage the Housing Register, this will include a front facing online form and back office processing and administration.

Online application form:

- Focused on making the resident-facing form easy to understand and complete to encourage self-service, simplifying language and re-using the Hackney design system.
- Reduced the number of questions and made applicants aware up front of expected waiting times and other housing options. Clear signposting towards support throughout the form.
- Designed for different genders, we added 'prefer to self-describe' to make the design more inclusive and this has been added to the Council's design library.

On the staff side, we have developed an administration tool to view, assign and manage applications. Officers can see applications that are in progress or submitted and view relevant evidence linked to the application. They can notify residents via email of the assessment decision and generate bidding numbers.

Future functionality developments will enable online change of circumstances, annual reviews, view only, recovering the Housing Register waiting time tool, and track bedroom need updates based on age changes, which will help ensure applications are kept up to date.

Work plan - With the introduction of the new Allocations Policy in October 2021 the Benefits and Housing Needs Service agreed a three phase work plan from October 2021. Delays in replacing Universal Housing have restricted work on phase one but this is now fully underway. The Service prioritises those households that would be negatively impacted ie those where the change is one which will shorten their waiting time or they are very close to successfully bidding for a property.

	Phase One

- **Reserve band applicants not eligible for the new register** - received 110 enquiries from residents asking for a reconsideration, of these 67 applicants had changes that meant they qualified under the new rules.
- **General band applicants not eligible for the new register -** received 363 enquiries from residents asking for a reconsideration, of these 80 applicants had changes that meant they qualified under the new rules. 106 applicants are yet to complete the reapplication process.
- **New Applicants** - received 795 requests to join the Housing Register since October 2020. 190 households have been invited to complete an online application and 117 of these have been accepted. The service is planning to invite all new applicants to complete the registration process by the end of this calendar year.
  - **Accepted Homeless Cases** - 1024 households have been accepted as homeless since October 2020 and are eligible to join the housing register. 351 have been registered, 673 remain to be processed (this is expected to complete by the end of the calendar year). Single people have been prioritised as the waiting time is shorter for one bedroom properties.
- **Reported changes in circumstances -** 684 households have experienced a change in circumstances that they have reported and may change their bidding needs. Those who are urgent and may be at risk of being disadvantaged have been prioritised.

Phase Two - Review of existing applicants

- Applicant circumstances change over time but are frequently unreported. To ensure the continued accuracy of household details and eligibility Phase two will review approximately 1000 applications of more complex cases involving significant medical assessments, overcrowding, social need and under occupation.

Phase Three - Further review and business as usual

	● Applications from residents over 55 and eligible for sheltered or older persons accommodation and those with low level medical need specifically will be reviewed.

	● Business as usual will see regular planned reviews of all applications to maintain the accuracy and integrity of the housing register. The anxiety caused to residents by the impacts of the cyber attack on processing times has resulted in high levels of calls to the Council's contact centre. This is compounded by additional demand caused by the housing crisis and cost of living emergency. To mitigate this and minimise the waiting times for people with the most urgent cases, the Council's housing advice contact number has now been split into four separate queues: Homelessness, Temporary Accommodation, Choice Based Lettings and Housing Advice with the homelessness queue prioritised. Additional staff have also been employed and trained to help us provide the best possible service to residents needing housing support and advice. Previous member updates on this topic can be found attached below: ● Housing Register Member Briefing ● New Lettings Policy Members Briefing - Housing Register Transition