

CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY REVIEW BOARD 12 March 2020



Report sponsor: Emily Feenan, Director of
Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services
Report author: Mick Styne, Elections and Local
Land Charges Manager

Local Land Charges – Update on Official Search Requests

Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update on the current position relating to the turnaround for Official Local Land Charges property search requests and update on progress made with the service improvement plan since May 2019.

Recommendation

- 2.1 To note the background and information contained within this report regarding progress made to improve records management, increase resilience in the team and improve our turnaround times and to keep customers and stakeholders informed of future progress.

Reason

- 3.1 To provide an overview to Corporate Services Scrutiny Board regarding work carried out to date to improve turnaround for Official Search requests and availability of appointments for Personal Searches.

Background information

- 4.1 The Local Land Charges team use both computerised and manual records to provide responses to property search requests. In February 2019 the service transferred to a new computer system and since then there have been issues with the migration of data. There have also been resilience issues and, where the service has suffered from staff sickness, there have been single points of failure in the delivery of the search process. This has together impacted on turnaround times for the service.
- 4.2 In May 2019 the turnaround for Official Search requests was 38 working days and at that time there were concerns raised by stakeholders including The Minister for Housing, Local Estate Agents, Personal Search companies, conveyancers and the press. To help turn things around we engaged with our colleagues including teams within the organisation, those in other authorities together with colleagues at Land Data and our software supplier to understand and plan to improve the efficiency of processes and turnaround times.

- 4.3 At the time of writing this report Official Search turnaround has significantly improved and stands at approximately 9 working days. The Government's expected local authority response time target for search requests is 10 working days or less.
- 4.4 Private search providers can also request to view records so that they can compile search information for their customers. They are able to access and inspect Local Land Charges Register information by appointment, free of charge. The wait time for an appointment has reduced from around 42 working days in May 2019 to approximately 12 working days at the time of writing this report.
- 4.5 Since May 2019 the Local Land Charges Team have engaged with colleagues in Change Derby, Business Support, ICT, Planning and Property Services to review and understand processes to enable incorrectly migrated data to be corrected and look to automate as many responses to search questions as possible.
- 4.6 We are also working closely with our system supplier, IDOX, to identify what went wrong with the initial migration and for them to make changes to the system to assist with the automation of responses. We have also identified training and coaching needs that will help the team better understand the way the software operates and improve our efficiency.
- 4.7 Improvements that we have implemented so far include
- Removing single points of failure in processes by making sure more than one member of staff can carry out each role
 - Creating a polygon around each search application site that helps to determine items to be revealed as part of the search process.
 - Capturing Local Land Charges Register items using mapping tools
 - Capturing planning agreements such as section 106 agreements on mapping so these appear in a search result
 - Remove the duplication of smoke control orders
 - Training and use of related databases and electronic maps
- 4.8 Future changes will include
- Planning records being corrected where decisions should have been recorded with conditions to reduce searching and manual correction of entries in the Local Land Charges Register.
 - Expiry dates for agreements and financial charges to be corrected by the software supplier so that expired register entries are not included in search answers.
 - Dates and decision fields to be populated by the software supplier to reduce the amount of manual data entry
 - Information on schemes such as A38 improvement works to be automated to appear in CON29 responses.
 - Limiting the amount of planning history revealed in a search response to 20 years (back to 1.April.2000) from 1 April 2020. (Currently planning history is revealed to 1 April 1974 i.e. 46 years).

- Work with IT, Planning and our software system suppliers to further automate datasets and reduce missing or duplication of records to improve turnaround times.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 We meet with Estate Agents, Personal Search representatives and those involved with the search process from a legal / conveyancing perspective. A progress review meeting is scheduled for 4 March 2020.
- 5.2 We update our website with turnaround information to help manage customer expectations and liaise with search providers such as Severn Trent, TM Property Searches and the National Land Information Service (NLIS) to manage customer expectations.

Other options

- 6.1 None

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 The current system requires corrections to the data held as a result of migration of data to the current software system. We are working with IDOX, the system suppliers, to correct data in the system where it should have migrated through correctly at their cost.
- 7.2 We are also looking to further improve the way data is managed in the system by working with our team members, ICT, Planning and Property Services colleagues to improve data quality which should help us to improve turnaround and maintain / increase income.

Whilst there are likely to be additional costs in improving the way historic data links to records in the system we aim to automate many of the responses to search questions to avoid both duplication and manual entry of information in order to provide a more efficient and cost effective service.
- 7.3

Legal implications

- 8.1 The Council is legally obliged to provide Local Land Charges Register information to customers requesting information for a fee and is also required to give access to Local Land Charges Register information for free to personal search representatives. The Local Land Charges Act (1975) is the framework relating to this service area.

The service also answers a number of questions in response to form CON29 which the Law Society have developed in order to assist the conveyancing process.

Other significant implications

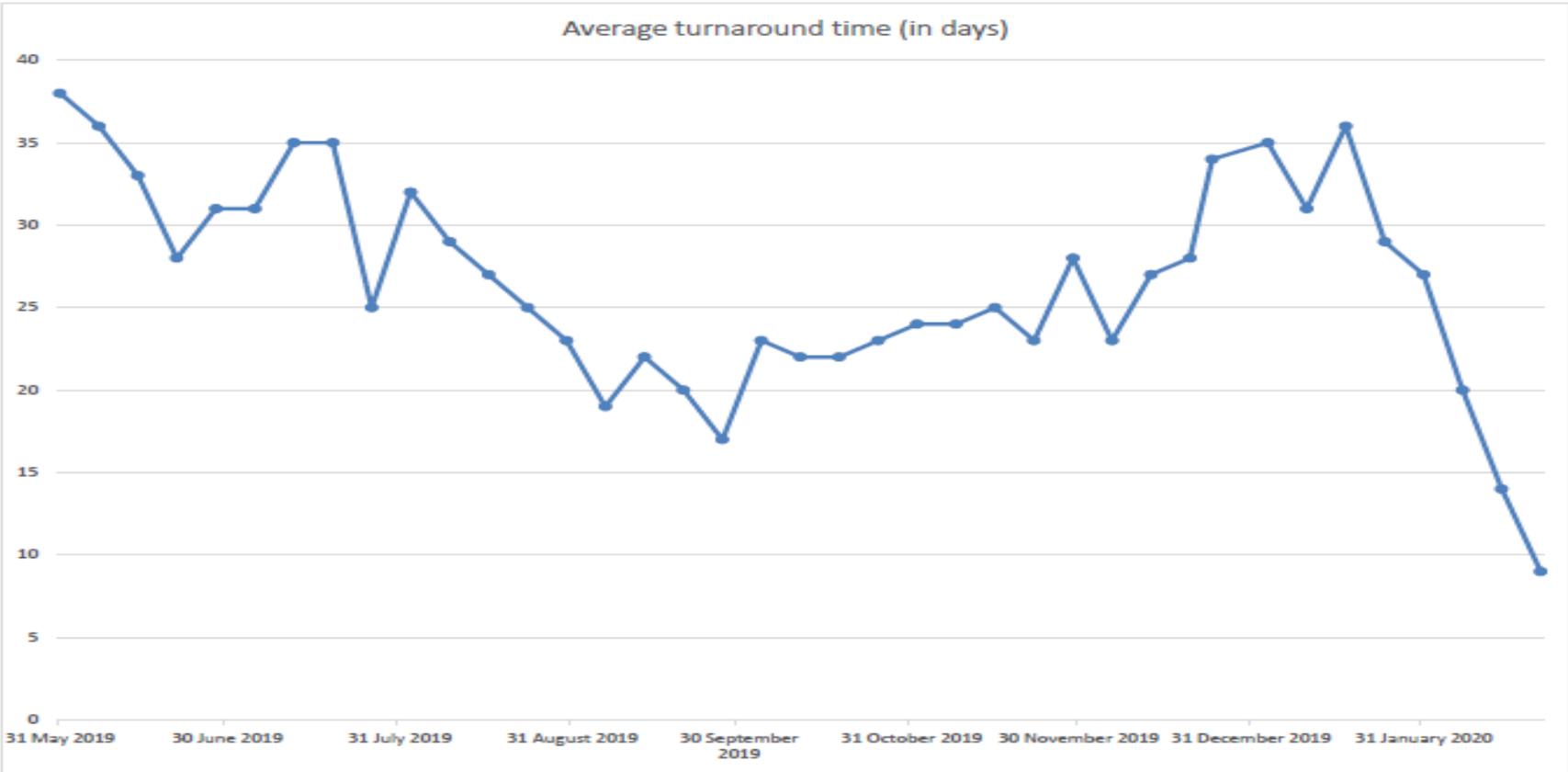
- 9.1 If we do not improve data in the ways outlined above we are likely attract adverse attention from stakeholders and the media. Delays in search responses can have an adverse effect on the property market and those in the process of buying and selling properties.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Emily Feenan, Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services	04/03/2020
Finance Service Director(s)	Peter Shilcock, Accountancy Emily Feenan, Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services	
Report sponsor Other(s)	Mick Styne, Elections and Local Land Charges Manager	19/02/2020

Background papers:	Not applicable
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Turnaround times May 2019 to 14 Feb 2020 Appendix 2 – Search Backlog May 2019 to 14 Feb 2020

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

