Socal Housing innovation lab

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It was great to have such a wide range of viewpoints on social housing in our group. Zahid works on the ground to match applicants with homes in Kirkstall ward. Tracey delivers focused support to the homeless and those with mental health issues. Nick works centrally to improve the ways people looking for help with housing are informed of their options. Tracey is both a social housing tenant and a council officer helping to improve access to information among young people.

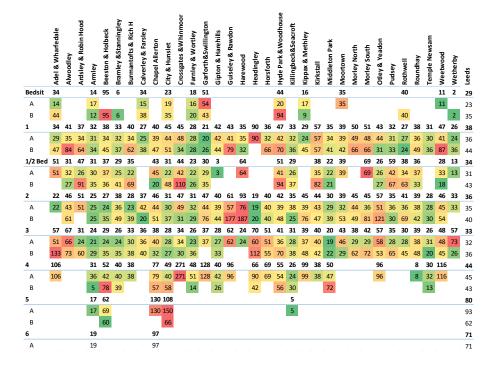
Leeds already had great open data on housing and the data opened up on the day is an excellent addition. New and unexpected positive outcomes have already come from the data being open and I think we'll even more great outcomes in the future.

A key learning point for me was hearing how a large number of applicants for social housing lack the information and understanding needed to make realistic choices. Many applications are made every week with absolutely no chance of success. This wastes time for officers and it disheartens applicants who do not understand why they have yet again failed to secure housing.

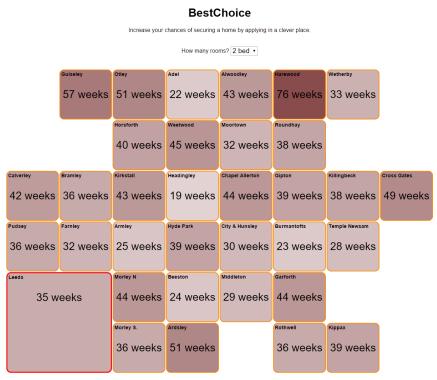
My initial plan was similar to many of the other groups; to prototype a "Zoopla for social housing". It would find homes that the user searched for and nudge them in the direction of homes that they would be more likely to secure. Because the tool would be based on open data it would be available all the time, not just during the Wednesday to Monday housing application window.

I soon realised that this tool would work or fail based on the power of the available data to improve people's choices so I decided to focus on testing that.

We know that a person's chance of being housed varies depending on where they apply within Leeds. From the data made available we can see the average waiting time required for someone in each need category to be housed in each ward. But how can we make this meaningful?



By showing each ward in Leeds on a simplified map we can show where houses are easier and harder to secure. On the example below someone looking for a 2-bed home in Gipton could make an informed choice to look in Burmantofts. If they did that they would be likely to secure a home with just 23 weeks waiting time instead of 39 weeks.



The tool is online at tomforth.co.uk/socialhousing.

This technique can be extended to more detailed statistics easily. Below is a similar pivot-table to the first but extended to cover every accommodation type and every need assessment category. Each row of this pivot table could be shown on a map in exactly the same way, though with any development like this it is essential to balance completeness and ease-of-use.

ow Labels	Adel & Wharfedale	Alwoodley	Ardsley & Robin Hood	Arn	nley	Beeston & Holbeck	
A-Add Needs Children		176	75	38	70		6
1 Bed Flat		288	70		127		10
1 Bed House							16
1 Bed Multi Storey Flat		:	38				
1/2 Bed Flat							
1/2 Bed House					27		
2 Bed Flat							
2 Bed House		9	91		36		
2 Bed Maisonette							
2 Bed Multi Storey Flat			13				
3 Bed Flat							
3 Bed House		64		38	21		
3 Bed Maisonette							
3 Bed Multi Storey Flat							
4 Bed House							
4 Bed House plus							
5 Bed House							
A-Additional Needs		29	39	39	23		
1 Bed Bungalow				60	25		
1 Bed Flat		25	11	21	28		
1 Bed House					31		
1 Bed MSF plus							
1 Bed Multi Storey Flat			22		16		
1/2 Bed Bungalow							
1/2 Bed Flat		:	34	16	30)	
1/2 Bed House		51		36	33		
2 Bed Bungalow							
2 Bed Flat			31	24	38		
2 Bed House			36	58	28		
2 Bed Maisonette					23		
2 Bed Multi Storey Flat			12		13		

There would be considerable value in exploring other data analysis and visualisation strategies which could inform service users. For example, users are currently told how long the last successful applicant to a property had been on the waiting list but this information is very likely to be out of date and of limited value in informing a current decision. I am sure we could improve that.