
REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 13
DATE OF MEETING:	5th JUNE 2008	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	MARK ALFLAT – DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	OPEN:
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	RUTH HARRIS – CBL PROJECT MANAGER (X5940)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	CHOICE BASED LETTINGS	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCSO1

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Members approve the final version of the proposed new Allocations Policy as attached at appendix 1.
- 1.2 That members note and instruct officers to take account of the comments arising from the consultation process, as detailed in section 4 of the report, about how the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system is operated.
- 1.3 That when the new CBL scheme is introduced (scheduled for December 1st 2008) initially 5% of allocations be opened up for sub-regional bidding.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To advise Members of issues raised through public consultation events regarding the proposed new Allocations Policy and the practical implementation of the Choice Based Lettings scheme. The proposed new policy is attached at appendix 1 and a 'gap analysis' between the current and the proposed policy is attached at appendix 2.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its April 2008 meeting Committee approved the draft new Allocations Policy in principal, subject to the findings of a range of consultation events.
- 3.2 Consultation events have taken place around the South Derbyshire District over the last month and the findings are now available. Comments relate primarily to the way the process will be operated rather than the content of policy.
- 3.3 The proposed new Allocations Policy has also been one of the first policies of the Council to be subjected to an Equality Impact Assessment. As a result of this, minor changes in the draft policy are proposed at 10.3.2, 12.2.2, 13.6.2, 16.1, 20.7.1 and 26.3. These are highlighted in italics in the policy at appendix 1.
- 3.4 A point of some discussion at the April Committee was the percentage of properties that would be opened up to sub-regional bidding. This report makes a

recommendation in that regard and namely that 5% of allocations be opened up for sub-regional bidding from the planned launch date on 1st December.

4. Detail

4.1 Communities and Local Government (CLG) Dep't Code of Guidance for CBL schemes 2007 states that authorities are required to consult RSL's with which they have nominations agreements. They also urge authorities to consult with organisations and individuals who provide advice and support to applicants, existing tenants, applicants and residents. Over the last two months we have carried out various consultation procedures designed to include all of the above groups.

4.2 All eleven RSL's working within the South Derbyshire district have been involved from the outset of the Choice Based Lettings process. Initial contact was made to seek their 'in principal' support in October 2007 before the submission of our funding bid to CLG. Regular updates of information have been forwarded and invitations offered to attend monthly CBL project board meetings. Our RSL's have, and continue to, provide input to the practical implementation of South Derbyshire's CBL scheme.

4.3 Our working alongside organisations and individuals who provide advice & support to vulnerable applicants will be crucial to the success of a choice based lettings scheme. We are very much aware that we often work with vulnerable client groups and are committed to creating a choice based lettings scheme that doesn't disadvantage these groups in any way. On the 19th May we hosted a consultation event aimed at those who provide the District's local support network. Some 15 different organisations attended and the main issues we concentrated on were in relation to making the most effective use of our adapted properties within the CBL system and how we will work together to allow vulnerable client groups to make full use of the new system. The main outcomes were to improve communication channels between the different organisations and protect the interests of vulnerable clients. We gave reassurances that in this implementation process we would continue to circulate info and consult upon it and that where necessary automatic bidding would be incorporated for particularly vulnerable clients.

4.4 Five public consultation events have also taken place around the district aimed at tenants, applicants and the general public. Letters were sent out to all applicants on the waiting list, a press release made and posters placed on all parish notice boards and other community based centres to advertise the events. The consultation events took the format of a welcome; followed by a talk on choice based lettings detailing how the system works and the proposed changes to the allocations process. The meetings then split into workshop groups and discussed any concerns, how we were going to make the system accessible to all and the proposed changes in detail. The events then progressed into a feedback session before closing. These events were held at the following locations.

- Melbourne Leisure Centre – 6th May
- Newhall Village Hall – 7th May
- Linton Village Hall – 12th May
- Swadlincote Town Hall – 13th May – evening meeting
- Hilton Village Hall – 15th May

Some 73 people attended the events.

4.5 Findings of the consultation events are as follows;

- A range of locations were suggested to advertise the void properties which included: web-site, libraries and community centres, local shops and post offices, parish notice boards, mail shots and free newspapers, although on the

latter point many raised concerns about this as they either didn't receive any or their delivery was very hit and miss. Everyone present at the events though felt happy that they could access at least one of the options given.

- The options available for placing bids on a property that were suggested were by telephone, letter, in person or via the web-site. Again all present were happy that they would be able to access these options.
- A user guide for the web-site and a list of locations where properties will be advertised was asked to be available both in hard copy and on the Council web-site. Attendees to the events were very interested in training sessions for the use of the web-site.
- Information showing the differences between a council and housing association tenancy were requested to be made available to applicants.
- Concerns were raised over whether people would have to re-submit all accompanying evidence held on their file such as doctors letters and as to whether they would 'lose the time' that they had been on the waiting list already. When told that this wouldn't have to happen in either case no more concerns were raised.
- All attendees to the events felt that the issues of owner/occupiers and those with arrears should be dealt with on an individual basis rather than with a blanket policy. Local connection was still important to all present but with that came an understanding that housing need was as important.
- The use of a property style shop in the town centre was an idea brought up by several groups as it was felt that people would feel more relaxed in a more informal setting.
- The banding system was discussed at the events and no concerns were raised although we did offer the option of looking at it in more depth and coming back to us with any concerns. At the time of preparing this report no further feedback had been received.
- The overall feedback from the events, after initial concerns and questions had been answered, was very positive. All who attended liked the transparency and openness of the system and also the reports and information that would be available to them that they have no access to with the current system.

4.6 Promotional material in the format of a booklet entitled 'Your Guide to a Proposed New Allocations System in South Derbyshire' has been sent out to all applicants on the current waiting list asking for their comments. At the time of preparing this report the deadline for comments had not been reached so therefore a verbal report will be available at the 5th June committee meeting.

4.7 In it's April 2008 meeting Committee discussed the percentage figure of allocations that would be placed through the sub-regional scheme with Derby City Council. We propose that initially 5% of our properties be opened up to bids from both the South Derbyshire and Derby waiting lists (subject to a reciprocal arrangement by Derby City Council). We then propose that we report back to Committee's June 2009 meeting with the results of this 'pilot' arrangement. Although these 5% of properties (to be chosen randomly) would be open to sub-regional offers the effect of the banding system, where a local connection will receive some priority, may be that South Derbyshire applicants are still favourably placed i.e. some or all of 5% of properties may go to local applicants even though opened up for wider bidding. The relatively low percentage figure of 5% for sub-regional bidding is proposed as this issue did appear to be of concern and until the system is fully operable the net effect cannot be accurately assessed. A balance needs to be struck between offering true sub-regional mobility whilst still meeting housing need in the District of South Derbyshire.

5.1 The budget for CBL introduction has already been approved and is the subject of grant aid from Government.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 The proposed new Allocations Policy seeks to fulfil our legal obligation to give reasonable preference to certain categories of applicants showing the most housing need.

7. Community Implications

7.1 Choice Based Lettings provides a transparent allocations system that aims to improve customer satisfaction and support vulnerable groups.

7.2 The initiative is placed on the customer, but also provides an accessible source of information about the property and neighbourhood allowing for informed choices and better tenancy sustainment.

8. South Derbyshire Tenant Forum Comments

8.1 At the time of writing this report SDTF comments had not been obtained.