

REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 8
DATE OF MEETING:	22nd April 2010	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Mark Alflat – Director Of Community Services	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Ros White – Housing Operations Manager	DOC:
SUBJECT:	The first year of Choice Based Lettings and the new Government Code of Guidance for allocations.	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCS01

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 Members note the outcomes of the first year of South Derbyshire Homefinder Choice Based Lettings Scheme and agree proposed actions to ensure compliance with the new Code of Guidance.

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 To advise members of the outcomes of the first year of South Derbyshire Homefinder Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

2.2 To advise members of the new Code of Guidance for Allocations and the implications for South Derbyshire Homefinder.

2.3 To gain approval for the proposed actions in order to comply with the new Code Of Guidance, as detailed in section 6 of the report.

3.0 Background

3.1 Members approved the new Allocations Policy in June 2008, with Choice Based Lettings beginning on 1st December 2008.

3.2 Members will recall that applicants to South Derbyshire Homefinder are categorised into four 'bands' to reflect their circumstances and housing need. These can be defined as follows:

- Emergency band - Households for whom the Council has a statutory duty to re-house.
- Band A - Homeless but no statutory duty (e.g. not in priority need) or having an urgent need to move.
- Band B: - Non urgent need to move
- Band C: - Adequately housed but wants to move

4.0 The First Year - Allocations by Banding

4.1 During the first year of South Derbyshire Homefinder (1.12.2008 to 1.12.2009) 227 properties were re-let to applicants from the joint waiting list. Of these:

- 39 (17%) went to Emergency band
- 112 (49%) to Band A

- 66 (29%) to Band B; and
- 10 (4%) to Band C.

4.2 Applicants in all bands, including homeless applicants, are required to bid for a property. Analysis of the first year's figures show that more work is needed to ensure a more even distribution across the bands.

5.0 New Guidance

5.1 On December 4th 2009 the Department for Communities and Local Government issued new statutory guidance on social housing allocations (A full copy is available if required). This Code of Guidance sets out 3 key objectives and outcomes that local authorities must achieve when framing their allocations schemes and 11 that it should endeavour to meet.

5.2 The objectives which we must meet are:

- Support for those in greatest housing need
- Providing settled homes for those who have experienced homelessness
- Promoting greater equality and clearly meeting equality duties

5.3 Those objectives which we should meet are:

- Greater choice and wider options for prospective and existing tenants.
- Creating mixed communities.
- Greater mobility for tenants within the social housing sector.
- Making better use of housing stock.
- Allocation policies that are fair and considered to be fair.
- Support for people in work or seeking work.
- Involving informing and consulting with local people.
- Communicating facts about the allocations scheme
- Having regard to the implications of the House of Lords judgement in the case of *R (on applications of Ahmed) V Newham*.
- Flexibility within the allocations policy to meet local pressures.
- Close working with the housing associations.

6.0 Compliance with the Code of Guidance.

6.1 In terms of meeting the requirements of the objectives listed at 5.2 there are 2 proposed actions:

- From April 2010 a quarterly report will be produced for the Housing Operations Manager, which details the allocations to date within each of the bands. This data will be used to manage future allocations in order to meet the objectives of the Code of Guidance and ensure a more even distribution of properties across each band.
- The Allocations policy is to be reviewed during 2010/11 and an equality impact assessment will be completed to ensure compliance with equality duties and to monitor lettings outcomes under the allocations scheme.

6.2 In terms of meeting the requirements of the objectives listed at 5.3 there are 4 proposed actions:

- As part of the review of the Allocations policy consideration will be given to local lettings policies which can be used to provide greater mobility for tenants, support those in work or seeking work, deal with concentrations of deprivation and ensure

properties which are particularly suited to being made accessible (e.g. ground floor flats) are prioritised for those with access needs.

- As part of the review of the Allocations policy consideration will be given to an enhanced incentive scheme to encourage tenants to “down size” or to vacate adapted properties they no longer need.
- The local community were consulted thoroughly on the proposed introduction of the current Allocations Policy and will be involved in this proposed review of the Allocations policy making it likely to achieve acceptance across the wider community and to be, not just fair, but seen to be fair.
- As part of the review of the Allocations policy it is proposed that information about what social housing is available in the district, how social housing is allocated and who is getting that social housing, is made available to tenants using a variety of mediums, such as newsletters, the web site, and performance reports.

7.0 Financial Implications

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

7.2 There are no additional financial implications at this stage.

8.0 Corporate Implications

8.1 The current Allocations Policy fulfils our legal obligation to give reasonable preference to certain categories of applicants showing the most housing need. In light of the new Code of Guidance a review will be completed during 2010/11 and approval sought for any recommended amendments

9.0 Community Implications

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

9.2 Choice Based Lettings places the initiative on the customer, provides information about the property and neighbourhood and allows customers to make an informed choice; all of which aids the sustainability of a tenancy.