
REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 11
DATE OF MEETING:	24th APRIL 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 proposed new Allocations Policy for consultation purposes.
- 1.2 Subject to approval of 1.1 also approve an intensive process of four weeks consultation on the proposed new policy with a report back to the Committee's June meeting.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To advise Members of the proposed new Allocations Policy. The policy needs revision to enable the continuation of progress towards a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme in conjunction with Derby City Council. The revised policy document is attached as appendix 1, the current policy as appendix 2 and a 'gap analysis' (differences) of the two policies as appendix 3.

3. Background

- 3.1 Committee approved the in principal, proposed introduction of a CBL scheme in line with the Government's target to allocate all social rented housing through CBL schemes by 2010, in it's August 2007 meeting.
- 3.2 Funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government for a Derby and South Derbyshire Sub-Regional CBL Scheme has been successful in full, with £56,774 being awarded to this council.
- 3.3 The use of a common Allocations Policy within a Sub-Regional CBL Scheme offers the benefits of cost savings but more importantly benefits the customer with a clearer and simplified use of the system. However the sophisticated IT software does enable partners to operate differences in their policies if necessary.
- 3.4 The Council now need to move forward the introduction of CBL in South Derbyshire and this report seeks approval for a draft new allocations policy and a period of consultation in relation to the proposed policy. The consultation process will include

mailshots to all current applicants, public meetings, meeting with other stakeholders, newspaper adverts, etc.

4. Detail

4.1 The Code of Guidance – January 2007 states that “where two or more housing authorities operate a CBL scheme on a regional or sub-regional basis, they are encouraged to consider the benefits of adopting a single, common allocations scheme across all the participating authorities”.

4.1.1 Our current allocations process is based upon preset points allocation to the elements of need shown by the applicant. With up to 30 different points awards that can be made the process is very in-depth and can be difficult to understand. The proposed new policy uses a banding system that places clients into one of four bands depending on their housing situation and then assesses how many ‘needs’ they have in their particular band; the more needs identified giving them greater priority in their band. A similar banding system has been implemented in most CBL schemes, although not in all cases.

4.1.2 The Housing Act 1996 states that any allocations scheme shall be framed so as to secure that reasonable preference is given to;

- people occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- people occupying housing accommodation which is temporary or occupied on insecure terms.
- families with dependant children.
- households consisting of or including someone who is expecting a child.
- households consisting of or including someone with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical or welfare grounds, and
- households whose social or economic circumstances are such that they have difficulty in securing settled accommodation.

The proposed new policy fulfils legal requirements by giving preference to all of the above categories. Our current policy does give extra points to the above categories but these are often over-shadowed by our local connection points system. For example, 40 local connection points are greater than 10 over-crowding points, therefore giving the local applicant preference over the over-crowded applicant.

4.2 Proposed amendments to be made to our current policy are detailed below with officer comment of the effect in *italics*;

Owner Occupiers

Within the existing policy owner/occupiers are only considered for housing through current homeless legislation or where the need for more suitable accommodation on the grounds of health or disability can be proven along with a lack of resources to secure their own accommodation.

The proposed new policy provides an open waiting list that allows all applicants to apply to go onto the register but states that due to the high demand for social housing in the district it is very unlikely they would be made an offer of housing. (appendix 1, section 13.5). However if medical and financial hardship were proved an offer of accommodation could still be made.

The effect of the change is likely to be minimal.

The existing policy allows all applicants onto the waiting list whether they have a local connection or not and then gives points to applicants with a local connection to give them priority.

Section 9.3 of the proposed new policy states that a local connection is not needed to register for housing. However, if a local connection is not shown it does mean that the applicant will not be eligible for some properties advertised in the CBL scheme.

Using this local connection rule allows for better management of more difficult to let and adapted properties.

Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)

Current policies of both South Derbyshire and Derby City state that each case should be assessed on it's own merits and that a property won't be offered to a tenant who has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour that would make them unsuitable to be a tenant. Our current policy states that applicants have to prove they have not carried out any ASB for 12 months and the new proposed policy has no timescales but looks to consider the extent of the ASB and treat each case individually (appendix 1, section 10.3)

Section 13.6 of the proposed policy adds clarity to the fact that the Council works in partnership with the Police, Probation Services, the Community Safety Partnership and housing providers to manage risk to the community. It also allows for more flexibility of a case by case consideration.

Outstanding Debt

Derby City Council have no out-standing debt policy written into their current CBL Allocations scheme other than that the applicant needs to show evidence of payments made to reduce the arrears.

Our current out-standing debt policy works well in recovering former debts and with this in mind we propose to keep our existing policy (appendix 1, section 12.2.8).

Homelessness Offers

Currently households owed a homeless duty receive one suitable offer of a property and if this is refused then the Council's homeless duty is discharged. The Government see the main benefit of CBL as offering choice and giving people a stake in where they live. Under the proposed new policy homeless applicants would be able to bid and refuse offered properties for 13 weeks. After this time they would be offered one suitable property and if this is declined the homeless duty is discharged (appendix 1, section 14.6)

A similar policy is proposed in the operation for the other Emergency band category, "statutorily over-crowded". If a suitable offer is made within the 3 month period and is refused the decision to place the applicant in the emergency band will be reviewed.

These changes are key to the principals behind CBL i.e. people make a choice to live in a certain location and property.

General Issues

The following sections have been added to the new policy to offer further clarity and advice to new applicants.

- Other available housing options (section 25.0)
- List of Registered Social Landlords (section 29.0)

- Careline Telecare Solutions (section 25.7)
- Policy on by-passing unsuitable applicants (section 20.5)
- Applicant contact for change in details (section 22.2)
- How to make a complaint (section 24.0)
- Policy on cancelling applications (section 22.5)

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 A budget for CBL introduction has already been agreed through the Committee process of upto £116,774 (£56,774 external grant funding and upto £60,000 HRA resources).

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.