

Committee:	Executive	Agenda Item No.:	9.
Date:	1 st December 2008	Status	Open
Category	2. Decision within the functions of Executive		
Subject:	Choice Based Letting (CBL)		
Report by:	Head of Housing		
Other Officers Involved	Housing Innovation Officer; Housing Needs Manager		
Director	Chief Executive		
Relevant Portfolio Holder	Housing Management		

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES – Providing customers with more choice over where they want to live.

REGENERATION – Developing sustainable communities where customers chose to live.

SOCIAL INCLUSION – Promoting fairness, equality and lifelong learning.

STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Continually improving our organisation by embracing new ways of working alone and with partners.

TARGETS

Not directly

VALUE FOR MONEY

The introduction of Choice based letting is a government priority. By working with other authorities the cost of implementation is shared and has made the scheme eligible for external funding from DCLG.

THE REPORT

In December 2006 the Council adopted a new scheme for allocating council housing. The covering report mentioned that the government had an expectation that all local authorities would introduce an allocations scheme that is based on choice by 2010. Such schemes are known as Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

At this time, it was unclear what the government meant by choice. The scheme adopted in Bolsover offers considerable choice to applicants who are

able to specify which areas and type of property they would consider. Initial conversations with DCLG suggested that the current Bolsover scheme was very close to the CBL model.

There is also an expectation from DCLG that, in line with local housing market areas (HMA's), that local authorities work together to provide CBL systems that work across HMA's and are not limited to individual local authorities.

Together with sub-regional partners (NEDDC, Chesterfield BC and Bassetlaw DC) the Authority has been successful in obtaining this external funding to part fund the introduction of CBL across the sub-region. The value of this external funding is £115,348. The majority of this funding is to purchase and implement government approved CBL software and interactive website.

At the time of the bid for external funding Bolsover had intended to join the scheme from 2010. And, in line with previous reports, would involve only slight modifications to the existing allocations scheme. This would be monitored before making any further commitment.

In October 2008 the government issued a new code of guidance "Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings" This makes it clear that all choice must be through an advertising scheme. In effect this means that the Authority needs to review its allocations scheme to ensure it meets the new requirements

It is therefore recommended that the Council adopt a CBL solution for the allocation of all council housing. There are financial implications of this – for both the cost of It equipment and also staffing. There have been capital and revenue budget bids submitted to cover this cost.

It is up to the Authority to decide how the system will work internally, but any new scheme must comply with guidance within the new Code of Guidance. Good practice examples have shown that the schemes that work best are those which are transparent and easy to understand, but do also retain the use of 'points' to prioritise rather than using a date order.

PPMG4 hope to carry out a Scrutiny Review of the allocation system. This was scheduled to begin in October 2008, but this was not completed due to the publication of the Code of Guidance the previous week. The group have however asked for a future session to focus on issues related to CBL within the District. This group could be used to develop the CBL option for Bolsover.

There is increased pressure from DCLG to develop CBL schemes that work across local authority boundaries. There are a number of advantages of such schemes for example it gives residents of one area access to other types of housing stock, and allows people more mobility for work or caring responsibilities.

It is proposed that the Authority lets 10% of housing stock using a common policy, and other partners have agreed to get a similar commitment from their

own organisations. This will assist local people who need to move to other areas in the region, especially those who require property types that are not widely available with the Council's own stock. This will help applicants, especially childless single people or couples to access accommodation elsewhere, and may help to find applicants for lower demand properties especially in sheltered housing schemes.

Allocation 10% of stock using the common policy does not mean that 10% of stock is let to people from outside the District, but the common policy will be used for these properties. They may still be let to people from Bolsover. The current policy also allows people from outside the District to apply for housing – since January 2007 there have been 745 lettings and 28 have been allocated to people from elsewhere within the sub-region (less than 4%)

Initial discussions with Housing Associations in the area have suggested that if a CBL system was to be introduced they may look to the Council to carry out allocations for more or all of their properties.

It is intended to provide a more complete and detailed report to a future meeting of the Executive. However, to ensure that the Authority is able to access the sub-regional funding with the other authorities within the sub-region, there needs to be an early formal commitment to this project. The recommendations within this report provide that commitment.

ISSUES/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Whether to commit to the Choice Based Lettings schemes proposed

IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Not directly from this report. However, the government has an expectation that all local authorities provide CBL. By working with other partners, the cost of implementation will be shared, and much of this will be eligible for a DCLG grant. A separate capital bid has been submitted for an interface to the existing Academy system, this bid is for approximately £17,000.

Legal: None directly, however to comply with the code of guidance "Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings the Authority must offer a CBL based system by 2010.

Human Resources: None directly from this report.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That Executive supports the shift to a Choice Based Letting system to allocate housing stock within Bolsover by 2010 subject to the necessary budget being in place.

2. That Executive approves working with the other authorities to develop the CBL IT system for the region.
3. That the Head of Housing works with the PPMG4 group to develop an appropriate CBL allocations scheme within Bolsover and this is reported to a future meeting of the Executive.
4. That Executive provisionally approve the draft sub-regional CBL scheme but grant delegated authority for the Head of Housing in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to agree minor amendments to the scheme.
5. That Executive provisionally approve that from April 2010 the Authority will commit 10% of housing stock to be allocated through a sub regional CBL system provided that the other partners make the same commitment.

REASON FOR DECISION TO BE GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTION

A change in government guidance has meant that the Authority needs to review and improve its approach to Choice Based Letting. There is an opportunity to participate in a sub-regional scheme that will share development cost and provide access to external funding.

ATTACHMENTS: Yes - Draft sub-regional CBL scheme and CBL Budget bid for information

FILE REFERENCE:
SOURCE DOCUMENT: