

Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy for Cross-Authority Lettings

1. Introduction

This document outlines the proposed common allocations policy for the Sub-Regional Partnership formed between the following local housing authorities:

- Bassetlaw District Council (A1 Housing Bassetlaw Ltd)
- Bolsover District Council
- Chesterfield Borough Council
- North East Derbyshire District Council (Rykneld Homes)

It is anticipated that this policy will be implemented from April 2009 to facilitate cross-boundary mobility via the Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

2. Principles

The principle of the Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme is that each partner agrees to offer an agreed proportion of available properties each year to applicants on any of the partner organisations housing registers. These properties will be advertised on the Sub-Regional section of the usual advertising medium and let in accordance with the Sub-Regional allocation policy. Each partner will continue to let the remaining majority of its properties through its own allocations scheme. Details of these are available from the individual partners.

3. Information Sharing

Each partner organisation will seek the express permission of housing applicants applying to join their housing register to share personal information about the applicant, and any members of their household expected to reside with them, with the other partner organisations and housing associations to whom nominations may be made.

Each partner will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

4. Equalities & Diversity

The partnership, through each individual partner organisation's own Equalities Policies and Procedures, will ensure that it does not discriminate against any person on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origin, disability, religion or belief, gender, sexuality, marital status, age or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice.

The partnership recognises that both equal treatment and positive action are necessary to counteract discrimination.

5. Allocation Criteria

Any applicant that has been accepted onto the housing register of one of the partner organisations is eligible to bid for properties identified for letting through the Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme. This includes applicants who are on the housing register of the partner organisation who is advertising the property.

All applicants will have their housing needs assessed in accordance with the Sub-Regional CBL policy and be placed in a housing needs band according to their circumstances. This will take into account the reasonable preference criteria outlined in the Housing Act (1996), as amended by the Homelessness Act (2002). Applicants in the same band will be sorted by date order.

The applicable date will initially be the date of application. If an applicant's circumstances change and their band changes so may the applicable date. If an applicant goes down a band following a re-assessment or change in circumstances, their applicable date will remain at their date of registration. If an applicant's need increases and they go up a band, their applicable date will be the date they enter the new band.

Properties let through the scheme will generally be let to the applicant in the highest housing needs band with the earliest applicable date who expressed an interest in the property and met the eligibility criteria (i.e. household size and type).

The Criteria for each Housing Needs Band can be seen at appendix A.

6. Lettings Targets (Relevance?)

In order to ensure that there is a fair distribution between transferring applicants and housing needs applicants, and that transferring applicants (who may have been on the housing register for a longer period of time) do not dominate the cross-boundary mobility moves, a target for each will be set. This target will be [two-thirds] of lettings to go to housing needs applicants and [one-third] to transfer applicants. This will be reviewed [quarterly] by the partnership.

7. Properties to be Included in the Scheme

Each partner organisation agrees to offer 10% of its available properties in each year to applicants on any of the partner organisations housing registers.

General Principles

- Exclude new-build properties unless specifically agreed as part of a nomination sharing agreement.
- Exclude vacancies that occur in settlements that have less than 10 social housing units.
- Exclude properties that are provided under Rural Exception Site policies and which are subject to any specific requirements to meet local housing needs under Section 106 of the Town & County Planning Act 1990.
- Partner organisations are encouraged, but not obliged, to include properties adapted for the disabled. These may be advertised when the vacancy first occurs, or later where it has not been possible to identify a suitable applicant from the partner's own housing register.
- Any other exclusion agreed by the partnership.

Number of each Property Type to be Included

The exact number and type of property to be included will be agreed annually by the partners and will be based on the stock profile and vacancy rate for each property type for the previous 2 years. In future years the proportion of properties may take into account the rate of population growth of the different organisation's areas.



These figures will be the minimum number of properties to be identified for cross-boundary moves and include all property types. Each partner may choose to include additional properties e.g. hard to let sheltered bed-sit flats.

It is up to each partner to select the properties that are to be identified for cross-boundary moves but low demand or less popular properties should not be over represented.

Re-advertising Properties

If a property has been advertised through the sub-regional scheme and no eligible expressions of interest are received, the landlord of the property may re-advertise it and relax the eligibility criteria. The property will be allocated at the end of the advertising cycle to the applicant with the highest priority as detailed in section 5.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The outcome of each letting made through the Sub-Regional CBL scheme will be monitored by the partnership on a quarterly basis. Corrective action will be proposed if an imbalance exists between properties advertised by each partner and the number of cross-boundary moves achieved.

8. Eligibility for Properties According to Size

Each organisation will allocate properties in accordance with their own allocation matrices set out in their own allocation policy.

9. Lettings Processes

Advertising through CBL

- Each partner organisation will identify properties to be advertised as available for cross-boundary mobility moves in accordance with section 7.
- The partner organisation will prepare an advert for these properties to be included in the next advertising cycle. Each cycle will commence on Tuesday at midnight and close on Tuesday at midnight in each week of the year.

- The advert will contain a photograph of the either the particular property or a photograph of a similar property type. If no photograph is available then the landlord's logo will be shown instead of a photograph. The advert will also contain a description of the property; other details including the rent and any other landlord charges as well as any eligibility criteria. It is the advertising landlord's responsibility to ensure that information is accurate and complete.
- The partner organisation advertising the property will set the eligibility requirements that the successful applicant must fulfil.
- Partner organisations will label advertised properties with the eligibility criteria to provide more information on who is entitled to express an interest in them. Labelling criteria that can be applied (but is not restricted to) include:
 - **Transferring tenant:** whether the property is only available to existing tenants of one of the partner organisations.
 - **Property size:** the number of bedrooms in the property and the size and type (i.e. children) of household that is eligible to bid for it.
 - **Property type and facilities:** the property type, floor level and any other relevant details.
 - **Age restrictions:** whether there is a minimum age requirement (e.g. sheltered housing).
 - **Adapted properties:** whether the property has adaptations such as ramped access or level access shower instead of a bath.
 - **Pets:** whether pets are allowed
 - **Area specific property:** to promote sustainable communities, partner organisations may introduce a specific policy in certain areas which varies from the overall lettings policy of that partner organisation. Where such a policy is in place, further details can be obtained from the relevant partner organisation.
 - **Housing needs band:** properties may be labelled for applicants within a specific housing needs band.
 - **Local connection:** whether the property is only available to households with a local connection with a particular local authority, open to households with a local connection to any of the local authorities in the sub-region or where there is no local connection restriction.



Bidding for Properties

To be considered for an available property, customers will be required to contact a partner organisation to express an interest in the property. This is called making a bid.

- Applicants may make up to 3 bids per advertising cycle through the sub-regional CBL scheme. These bids will be in addition to the number of bids the applicant is allowed to make to the partner organisation whose housing register they are on.
- Any applicant who has been accepted onto the housing register of one of the partner organisations is eligible to bid for properties identified for cross-boundary moves provided they meet the eligibility criteria and as long as they haven't already accepted the offer of any other property.
- Applicants will not be considered for any property they are not eligible to bid for. This includes but is not restricted to:
 - if the household's bedroom requirement is different to the number of bedrooms in the property, for example a single person would not be considered for a three-bedroom house;
 - where a customer does not meet the criteria of a local policy;
 - where there are disabled adaptations that the applicant does not need;
 - where there is an age restriction on the home.
- Applicants will be able to bid through the following mechanisms
 - Online via the website
 - Automated telephone system
 - Text message
 - In person at specified locations
- Bids must be made before the closing deadline shown in the advertisement otherwise the bid will not count.
- The partnership recognises that there will be applicants who have support needs and may need assistance with accessing or using the bidding system. Each partner organisation will have their own mechanisms in place for providing the level of support required by the individual applicants.



Shortlisting

Once the advertising cycle has closed, a shortlist of customers who expressed an interest in the home will be produced.

- The partner organisation that has advertised the property will review the shortlist and decide which applicant is eligible to be offered the property in accordance with this policy.
- If the partner organisation that has advertised the property does not have sufficient information on which to base a decision they may ask for the partner organisation on whose housing register the applicant was registered to provide additional information either by telephone or through the completion of a pro forma. This should be completed electronically and sent back by e-mail within 1 working day where practical.
- It is the responsibility of the partner organisation advertising the property to carry out their own verification checks in accordance with their own policy. If the partner organisation wishes to visit the applicant to verify their circumstances they will need to make the necessary arrangements to do so themselves. If the applicant is a current tenant of the partner organisation the applicant's landlord is to carry out the appropriate visits.
- If an applicant does not meet the verification criteria of the partner organisation advertising the property they will be considered to be ineligible to be offered the property. The partner organisation will overlook the applicant and move onto the next applicant on the shortlist. In doing so they will be responsible for advising, at the very least, the highest placed applicant that they are not eligible for the property and the reason for this.

Offer

- Having identified the applicant that is eligible for an offer the partner organisation will contact the applicant to invite them to view the property.
- Following the viewing the applicant will be required to confirm whether or not they wish to accept the property. The time scale for this will be based on the normal time scale used by the partner authority advertising the property.



- If the applicant accepts the property they will be invited to sign for the tenancy. If the applicant refuses the property the next eligible person is selected.
- If an applicant who accepts a property is on the housing register of another partner organisation the partner organisation that advertised the property will inform the applicant's current partner organisation of the tenancy start date within 1 working day of it being agreed.
- At the end of each month each partner organisation will compile a list of all applicants housed under the common allocation policy during the last month and forward this by e-mail to the other partner organisation. This is to ensure that these applicants are shown as housed on all partner organisations' housing registers that they are on.
- Once a tenancy start date has been agreed the partner organisation that advertised the property may request the applicant's file from the partner authority on whose housing register they are on. The file will be provided within 10 working days of this request.
- Once the tenancy is signed the tenant is required to give notice to the outgoing landlord in accordance with their policy.

Feedback

Feedback will be provided on all homes let through the sub-regional CBL scheme on a regular basis. This is to provide an open and transparent service to help customers make realistic choices.

Feedback details may include the housing needs band of the successful customer, and the total number of people who expressed interest in the home. No personal information will be disclosed.

10. Appeals Process

An applicant has a right to request a review of the following decisions: -

- That they are ineligible for an offer. This request will be made to the partner organisation that has advertised the property. An officer senior to the officer making the original decision and who was not involved in making the decision will carry out any such reviews.

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- That they were not offered the property having successfully bid for it. This request will be made to the partner organisation who was responsible for making the decision not to offer the property.

Appendix A

<p>One</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Statutory Homeless ● Statutory Unfit ● Critical or Crisis Medical ● Statutory Overcrowding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compulsory Purchase Orders ● Domestic Abuse ● Hospital Discharges ● Mental Health Protocol Referrals
<p>Band Two</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Duties under the Children’s Act 1989 ● Alternative to Adaptations ● Racial and Other Harassment ● Modernisation ● Release of a disabled persons adapted home ● Employees Tied Accommodation Ending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overcrowding – (2 or more bedrooms short) ● Lack of basis amenities ● General Medical Needs ● Non Statutory Homeless ● Under-occupation – Tenants Only ● Multiple Band Three Needs
<p>Band Three</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Special circumstances - i.e. Families with special needs children ● Low Level Overcrowding - (1 bedroom short) ● Relationship Breakdown ● Lodgers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Private Tenants Sharing Facilities ● Support Needs outside current boundary. - In partners boundary ● Children in Flats - Child under the age of 16
<p>Band Four</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All applicants with no specific housing need. <p>(Preference will be given to applicants with a connection to the advertising authority then to the sub regional authorities.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Applicants living outside sub regional boundaries



CAPITAL BUDGET BID – 2009/10

Project Lead Officer:

Job Title:

Department:

Project Title:

Brief outline of the project (max 30 words):

The Secretary of State believes that allocation policies for Social Housing should provide applicants to be given more of a say and a greater choice over the accommodation which they are allocated, while continuing to ensure that the primary purpose of social housing is to meet housing need.

Choice-based lettings (CBL) is a new method of allocating social housing. CBL schemes give people more choice in where they want to live by allowing people to apply (or 'bid') for advertised social housing vacancies. Available properties are advertised and applicants can apply for any property to which they are suitably matched. Housing authorities are still required to ensure that reasonable preference is extended to certain categories of applicants, for instance those who are homeless or who have medical need.

(Note – although there is a statutory requirement for all authorities to have a choice based letting system in place by 2010 it is not a statutory requirement to use the Abrisas solution)

This is a capital bid for the software. There is a linked revenue bid for the staff.

1. Describe any clear linkages this project has to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Aims, together with details of the outcomes this investment will deliver:

Community Safety – by allowing tenants/applicants to choose where they wish to live will allow them to live in areas where they want to live away from the threats of anti social behaviour or crime. CBL offers the promotion of safe and sustainable communities

Customer Focused – Choice Based Lettings offers a potential to deliver real benefits to residents; it represents a shift towards a much more customer focussed approach. Keeping tenants informed of the properties available and how to apply for them.

Regeneration – by giving tenants a choice of where they want to live they will look after the properties better and take pride in their homes and secure a decent standard of housing across the district.

Social Inclusion – by ensuring access to affordable social housing is transparent and that

members of the community are able to make more choices on their housing options.

Strategic Organisational Development – continue to review and improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of all Council Services.

In particular, Bolsover District Council has entered into a partnership with neighbouring authorities (Chesterfield, North East Derbyshire DC, and Bassetlaw) to procure the software on a sub-regional basis. This has attracted additional funding from CLG of £115k, this has been used for project management and implementation costs. If the council was to provide its own CBL system there would be no external funding and Bolsover would be liable for the full project costs.

2. Value for Money (VFM):

2a. Economy – describe how the project will save money, time or effort:

By implementing a CBL system across 4 authorities each authority has made significant saving on project management and implementation costs, and this approach has attracted external funding from DCLG.

The grant awarded is £115k and the project management costs estimated at £30k per year over a 2 year period (note the grant is used for project management, this saving should not be double counted).

2b. Efficiency – describe how the project will improve productivity or quality of services:

During implementation adopting a partnership approach will spread the workload over a number of officers within the 4 authorities. For Bolsover, other partners are more advanced, which provides an opportunity to learn from their mistakes and to glean their experience.

Reduce void periods allowing us to advertise properties as soon as the termination is received.

Giving applicants a choice and information encourage them to bid for properties in less demand than they may have usually have been interested in.

2c. Effectiveness – describe the impact this project will have on our customers:

Choice Based Lettings requires the applicant to play an active part in the allocation process by having to bid on the properties they are interested in. Advertising properties allows the applicant more choice as they may not always be aware of the properties that are available to them in their areas of choice. CBL also encourages ownership by the applicant because if they do not bid then they will not be successful in being rehoused. It will also give them a greater understanding of the process of letting properties.

3. Please state how much funding is sought from the Council, together with any other relevant sources of funding involved:

Tick here if funding is required beyond 2011/12

	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
Total cost of the project: Abitas software Capita Housing Interface Hosting, support & maintenance & data feeds	£35,450. £17,000	£8,735	£8,735
Less any external or existing funding: (provide details of funding status and exit strategy) CLG Contribution (Note DCLG funding to pay for project management of £115k over 4 authorities has been excluded from this calculation)	£15,000		
TOTAL funding required	£37,450	£8,735	£8,735

4. Please provide details of any revenue implications of the project, including any potential savings/additional income:

Tick here if expenditure or income extends beyond 2011/12

	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
Revenue costs:			
Fee for 0800 number (up to 24k mins across all partners)	£2,160	£2,160	£2,160
Incoming SMS messages	£1,150	£1,150	£1,150
Outgoing in SMS messages	£1,920	£1,920	£1,920
Additional consultancy (5 days pa)	£3,250	£3,250	£3,250
Staffing costs (see separate Revenue bid)			
Income/potential savings:			
NET TOTAL	£8,480	£8,480	£8,480
Less any external or existing funding: (provide details)			
TOTAL net revenue cost	£8,480	£8,480	£8,480

5. Risk Management

5a. Identify the main risk factors that could delay or prevent implementation of the project, together with any proposed actions to manage the risks:

Lack of resources to provide a good quality CBL scheme. Please see linked revenue bid.

The scheme needs to be handled carefully, in some authorities elected members have felt that the introduction of a CBL letting scheme has excluded them from the process. Action – to involve members throughout process.

Software not working – but this is a government promoted solution that has been seen to work elsewhere.

5b. Describe the risks or consequences of not proceeding with this project

It is a Government target for all local authorities to operate CBL schemes by 2010. It is unclear what punitive action the government could take.

Signature of relevant Director:

