

# **Information/Discussion Paper**

## **Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny**

**10th September 2007**

### **Choice Based Lettings Progress Report**

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

#### **1. Why has this come to scrutiny?**

- 1.1 To update Overview and Scrutiny with progress made with regards to the Choice Based Lettings project
- 1.2 To give a verbal presentation of the principles of Choice Based Lettings and how the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership envisages those principles operating in practice in Gloucestershire
- 1.3 To take on board any comments or issues raised by scrutiny to inform the further development of Choice based Lettings in Gloucestershire.

#### **2. Summary of the Issue**

##### **2.1 Background**

The Government's Choice Based Lettings (CBL) policy has its origins in the Housing Green Paper, 'Quality & Choice'- A Decent Home for All, published in April 2000.

The statutory Code of Guidance on the allocation of accommodation states the Government's belief that:

**"...allocation policies for social housing should provide choice wherever possible, while continuing to meet housing need...this is the best way to ensure sustainable tenancies and to build settled and stable communities..."**

This approach is further supported through the Audit Commission's key line of enquiry which states that an organisation wishing to deliver an excellent service should have a 'clear policy in place aimed at maximising choice for applicants in accordance with the allocation policy such as a CBL scheme'.

##### **Choice Based lettings in practice**

Choice Based Lettings is an alternative way in which social landlords can let their

homes by advertising them and allowing people in housing need to 'nominate' themselves for them through a bidding system.

It involves replacing the current points based system with a web based property advertising scheme more akin to an estate agents. People who need housing would register as they do now however, rather than wait for a property to be offered to them, they would put themselves forward for any appropriate available properties advertised for which they are eligible.

### **Establishment of Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership**

Following a successful pilot programme, the ODPM published targets for moving towards greater housing choice in Spring 2002; with 25% of local authorities required to have CBL systems by the end of 2005 and 100% by 2010.

In July 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to all local authorities advising them that it was making £4m available for the development of regional and sub-regional choice based letting schemes. In order to take full advantage of this funding opportunity, a Gloucestershire Choice Based Lettings Partnership was established.

Up to £100,000 funding was offered for schemes which are developed on a regional or subregional level and so Cheltenham Borough Council explored the benefits of adopting a CBL scheme with its partner district authorities on a county wide basis. This would involve 6 district councils in Gloucestershire working together with their Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners and private landlords to create a simpler way for people in housing need to access all available properties for letting, including shared ownership and low cost home ownership properties throughout the county.

The Partnership were successful in the funding bid and received £150,000 to support the implementation of a sub regional choice based lettings scheme.

### **Objectives of the Partnership**

The Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership has set itself the following objectives in developing a model to be considered for implementing Choice Based Lettings across Gloucestershire:

- To increase choice for applicants.
- To improve levels of customer satisfaction with the letting process.
- To achieve fairness and transparency in the letting of homes.
- To enable better partnership working across the range of authorities and landlords involved in the scheme.
- To work towards cross boundary lettings

- To improve efficiency in the lettings process and reduce turnaround times.
- To re-brand social housing as a tenure of choice.
- To ensure that vulnerable people and minorities are not disadvantaged in the letting process.
- To make best use of housing stock
- To ensure that people understand their realistic housing options and are able to take more responsibility for meeting their own needs.

### **3. Summary of evidence/information**

**3.1** The verbal presentation will include further details regarding:

- Overview of Choice Based Lettings principles
- Aims and objectives of Glos. Homeseeker Partnership
- Progress of partnership to date - framework

### **4. Next Steps**

**4.1** Comments and issues raised by Overview and Scrutiny following the presentation will be collated by the Service Manger – Community Services and fed back to the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership to inform the further development of the Choice Based Lettings model.

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#### **Background Papers**

Housing Allocations Policy 2005  
 Sustainable Communities – A five year plan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
 Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).  
 Review of Allocation Policy – Shelter - April 2005  
 Homes For All – The Governments 5 year housing plan - January 2005  
 Piloting Choice Based Lettings – An evaluation - ODPM  
 Cabinet Report; Choice Based lettings 29<sup>th</sup> November 2005.  
 Cabinet Report; Housing Allocations Policy 12<sup>th</sup> May 2006

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**Accountability**

Councillor Chris Ryder

Cabinet Member Quality of Life

**Scrutiny Function**

Social and Community