

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE CABINET

June 13th 2007

**THE SUB REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME PROPOSED
BANDING MODEL AND ALLOCATIONS SCHEME**

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Cllr Peter Whittaker
Responsible Head of Service	David Hammond

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report again revisits the Council's plans for implementing Choice Based Lettings (CBL) the Government's policy for the allocation of social housing which it aims to have in place nationwide by 2010.
- 1.2 At the meeting on the 4th April 2007, the Executive Cabinet considered a report outlining the development of a cross authority (Sub Regional) Choice Based Lettings Scheme and approved the proposals for implementation.
- 1.3 It was identified that a further report would be forthcoming providing the detail of the banding of housing applicants within the proposed new scheme that is designed to replace the conventional points based allocations process.
- 1.4 This report therefore brings forward for approval the proposed banding model and eligibility criteria to be used in the operation of the new Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme and identifies the key changes compared with the Council's current allocations policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Members note the report.
- 2.2 That the proposed Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Banding Model and Eligibility Criteria set out at Appendix I be approved as the basis of the allocations policy for the operation of the new sub regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

- 2.3 That delegated authority be granted to the Head of Planning & Environment Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing to agree the final alignment of bandings in the new scheme with the levels of housing need identified by the existing points scheme.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members will recall from previous reports that '**Choice Based Lettings**' is a Government lead new method of allocating social housing that is designed to replace the conventional points driven housing waiting list approach. The aim of the new approach is to offer people more choice and control over where they live with the objective of creating more settled and sustainable communities.

- 3.2 **The CLG has set targets for the introduction of Choice Based Lettings. By 2010 all local authorities will have to have adopted a choice based lettings system.**

3.3 The key objectives of the scheme

- To provide a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme across the 8 LAs, providing consistency in the home seeking process cross authority
- To enable home seekers to be empowered to make their own choices about where they want to live
- To ensure the scheme is accessible by all those in housing need, particularly the more vulnerable
- To make the process simpler, more transparent, fair and easy to use.
- To support mobility within the sub-region particularly where local connections are evidenced, in line with the regional Housing Strategy
- To enable applicants to make realistic choices about their housing options with social rented, intermediate and private housing all available via the CBL scheme
- To prevent and reduce the placement of homeless households in temporary accommodation by giving people realistic choices
- Improve the mix and sustainability of local communities

- 3.4 **Greater choice to applicants** - The sub-regional CBL scheme will provide a consistent approach to assisting home seekers across the 8 L.A.'s with a range of tenure options. There will be a common housing application form, allocations policy and banding system for all L.A. areas so that there is consistency in the way that customers apply and are prioritised for housing, with flexibility built in for the individual housing providers, primarily via the advertising of properties, to be able

to continue to offer management moves or direct matching to those who need special consideration. This will be particularly beneficial in matching adapted properties to households with a disabled member in housing need.

- 3.5 Adverts will include a photograph of the property, rental/mortgage costs and the eligibility criteria specific to the property. Eventually it is hoped that links can be established to GIS to enable people to view the general area and the nearest facilities e.g. schools, leisure centres etc helping them to make the best choice to suit their needs. Short listed applicants will be offered a viewing prior to accepting the property to give the opportunity for questions and to ensure the home is right to meet their needs.
- 3.6 The partnership has consulted local stakeholders e.g. black & minority ethnic, gypsies, no fixed abodes, disabled people, people with learning disabilities etc and has made contact with relevant organisations such as Ethnic Access, Social Services, and Primary Care Trusts to ensure our communication networks are appropriate to meet the needs of vulnerable and minority groups.
- 3.7 CLG research has shown that CBL improves the housing prospects of statutory homeless households which will help to reduce the number of households currently in temporary accommodation and meet the government target of a 50% reduction by 2010
- 3.8 The new sub regional CBL scheme is designed to ensure that those in housing need with a local connection to the individual local authority area receive the greatest priority. This is important as it is recognised that the sub region faces very high levels of housing need and local people need to be awarded priority.
- 3.9 **Progress to date:**
 - Publicity of the success of our sub regional bid
 - Engagement of all relevant partners
 - Authority to proceed via the local political process
 - Partnership agreement finalised and ready for authorised signatories
 - Procurement route agreed and waivering report authorised.
 - Agreement that Wychavon DC provide a Project Management role to facilitate implementation.
 - Negotiation with software providers for cost of software
- 3.10 The partners to the sub regional scheme will continue to meet 2/3 times a year after implementation to further develop/enhance the sub regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme and develop longer term cost efficiencies.

4.0 **DETAIL OF THE PROPOSED MODEL FOR THE SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME**

- 4.1 The council's current allocations policy is based on a points system whereby a household's housing need is reflected by the number of points awarded. Applicants are advised of their points and are then placed on the housing register with no real indication of the likelihood of them being offered a suitable property, in their area of choice within a set timescale. The shortage of the supply of social housing in the District means that applicants can be waiting years for a property to become available.
- 4.2 Under the proposed Choice Based Lettings Scheme, there will continue to be an open registration process and applicants will be assessed for eligibility in accordance with existing policy at registration.
- 4.3 The new sub regional Choice Based Lettings scheme will consider an applicant's housing need using a banding system to reflect their priority in the scheme. For example Band 1 will be awarded to those applicants in the highest housing need. Within each band extra weighting may be awarded to reflect those in multiple housing needs who have been on the list the longest. The applicant in the highest banding with the longest time on the waiting list will be in the best position when expressing an interest in any property advertised for which they are eligible.
- 4.4 The model will be separated into six bands which will deal with those with and without a local connection separately. This means that those with a housing need and local connection to Bromsgrove District will receive priority over those in housing need without a local connection to the District. This is in recognition that the South Housing Market Area sub region experiences high levels of housing need and a shortage in the supply of affordable housing.
- 4.5 A priority card is given to those households accepted as homeless for a three month period which gives that household highest priority in the scheme. The period of time that a household is eligible for the priority card can be extended at the discretion of the Council's agent, BDHT, should there be good cause i.e. lack of suitable properties becoming available within the 3 month period. Those who are accepted as homeless are expected to start bidding for properties within a two week period. If they fail to make bids for eligible properties within that period an officer at BDHT may start making bids on their behalf.
- 4.6 Vacant social rented properties will be advertised giving clear, basic eligibility criteria (indicating which category of applicants qualify to bid) and will be promoted across a wide range of community access points. Property vacancies will be advertised with a photograph, key details for the property and eligibility criteria. Subject to GIS implementation, a link to GIS mapping detailing local services and facilities will be available

via the internet and DigiTV. The information available to people will enable them to make informed choices when deciding whether to express their interest. A simple self-assessment tool will be made available to enable people to judge whether it is realistic for them to bid for a particular vacancy.

- 4.7 People will continue to be able to choose where they want to live and express their interest via integrated telephony, internet, DigiTV, text messaging, social housing provider offices, Worcestershire Hubs and other council offices. This selection will be not just in terms of which LA area/s, but which tenures, which landlords, sub-area, estates, streets, style of property etc. Shared ownership and privately rented properties will also be able to be advertised and allocated via the same process.
- 4.8 Once the application has been verified, selected potential residents will be invited to view the vacancy before a final offer is made.
- 4.9 Applicants will not be suspended on the register if they decide the property is not right for them. People will be able to see advertised non-personal details of each letting, this will help people to understand their chances and enable people to be realistic about which options they pursue.
- 4.10 Additional arrangements will be put in place to ensure that vulnerable people are able to access the scheme e.g. housing advice, advocacy, home visits and help to register onto the scheme.
- 4.11 It is important to engage with hard to reach groups and those from minority groups. Some of these households find it hard to access services due to language barriers, cultural barriers and the nature of their lifestyle. It is important that the sub regional scheme meets the needs of local people. We will ensure that accessibility to information is made available in appropriate different languages, in large text, audio/screen readers etc.
- 4.12 The Scheme will help the homeless by offering more options for people, reduce the use of temporary accommodation and allow better matching of properties to applicants.
- 4.13 Where specially adapted properties become vacant, this scheme will help to ensure they are matched with people who need them, increasing the opportunities available for disabled people.
- 4.14 An appeals procedure will be available where applicants are unhappy with a decision made under this scheme.
- 4.15 Members are asked to approve the proposed Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Banding Model and Eligibility Criteria set out at Appendix I as the basis of the allocations policy for the operation of the new sub regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

- 4.16 Members are asked to grant delegated authority to the Head of Planning & Environment Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing to agree the final alignment of bandings in the new scheme with the levels of housing need identified by the existing points scheme (i.e. which levels of housing need are to fall into which band).

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Details of the capital and revenue financial implications of introducing the Choice Based Lettings Scheme were included in the April report and were considered by Members when they approved the overall scheme for implementation.
- 5.2 The detail in this report relates solely to the way in which the dwellings will be allocated under the new scheme and have no additional financial implication to those already considered and approved.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 6.1 CLG research established that most CBL case studies have seen some diffusion of minority ethnic settlement away from existing areas of concentration and towards 'non-traditional' areas. Consequently, CBL contributes to relieving rather than exacerbating ethnic segregation. The research also found that minority ethnic applicants with little or no English find it difficult to use CBL without the assistance from family and friends or community and voluntary groups. An internet link for customer use at the Customer Service Centre will be provided.
- 6.2 Research carried out by Festival Housing Group identified that households from ethnic minority groups were less likely to have internet access at home.
- 6.3 The needs of all diversity groups will be considered within the scheme development and people with physical or mental impairments who may have difficulty in registering and bidding on the scheme will have access to assistance to enable them to do so. Voluntary organisations and the caring professions will be briefed to raise awareness of the scheme rules and processes.
- 6.4 It is important to engage with hard to reach groups and those from minority groups. Some of these households find it hard to access services due to language barriers, cultural barriers and the nature of their lifestyle. It is important that the sub regional scheme meets the needs of local people. We will ensure that accessibility to information is made available

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The scheme must comply with Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and be compatible with obligations imposed on the Council by other legislation, including but not limited to:

The Race Relations Act 1976
The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
The Human Rights Act
The Freedom of Information Act 2000

8.0 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 8.1 **Objective 1 – Regeneration (Town Centre, Longbridge and Housing)**

Empowering those in housing need to understand the supply and demand issues for social housing in Bromsgrove and to have access to a range of housing options beyond social housing that could meet their needs.

Develop a stronger connection with the private rented sector and increase housing options to those in housing need.

- 8.2 **Objective 2 – Improvement (Customer Service, Reputation and Performance)**

Offer greater opportunities for mobility through the sub regional scheme. Improve mobility through the advertisement of mutual exchange opportunities. Increase accessibility for minority ethnic and vulnerable groups.

- 8.3 **Objective 3 – Sense of Community and Wellbeing (Community Influence and Community Events)**

In most cases research has shown that the introduction of CBL has been followed by improved tenancy sustainment. The tendency for improved tenancy sustainment should be seen as reflecting improved tenant satisfaction with lettings outcomes. It should also contribute to greater residential stability in what were previously unstable neighbourhoods.

- 8.4 **Priority 4 – Environment – Clean District and Planning**

As per 10.3 above.

9.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 Implementation is dependent upon the cooperation of BDHT who carry out the Housing Register and nominations work for the Council under an SLA.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The implementation plan of CBL includes consultation and awareness raising exercises for residents. Our first press release was issued on the 22nd Jan 07. The need for staff to be trained in CBL is included in the implementation plan and is an identified cost included in the Capital funding of the scheme.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues – Advice has been sought from Alex Haslam. Because of the nature of the scheme it is impractical to separately tender and therefore to make best use of system implemented at Wychavon DC and to benefit from the Government funding, all Districts are supporting extension of this system to the sub region. To this end, a tender waivering report has been authorised by the Chief Executive.

Personnel Implications – None as implementation staffing to be supplied by Wychavon and shared Sub Regionally. Experience elsewhere indicates that CBL can reduce staff inputting time.

Governance/Performance Management

"Homes for All", the Government's 5-year housing plan, set out the Government's plans for taking forward its choice-based lettings (CBL) policy. The aim is to have in place nationwide choice by 2010. "Homes for All" also made clear that the Government is keen that choice-based lettings systems should operate sub-regionally or regionally, recognising that housing markets do not follow local authority boundaries.

CLG is therefore committed to ensuring that social housing tenants have more choice and control over where they live. They want to see CBL schemes developed which span local authority boundaries and which bring together all social landlords in an area to offer the widest possible housing choices for tenants and landlords.

The CLG has set targets for the introduction of Choice Based Lettings. By 2010 all local authorities will have to have adopted a choice based lettings system.

Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Providing people with choice where they live promotes personal investment and greater sustainability of communities.

Policy

Introduction of the CBL scheme will necessitate the re writing of the Council's housing allocations policy based upon the principles set out in this report and the alignment of housing need with bandings under the new scheme.

Government Policy

In the Secretary of State's view all housing authorities should adopt an allocation scheme which offers a choice of accommodation and she has set a target for all housing authorities to have done so by 2010. Whilst the 1996 housing act does not specify how authorities should offer a choice of accommodation in the Secretary of State's view the most effective way of doing so is by adopting an advertising scheme.

In January 2005, ODPM published 'Sustainable Communities: Homes for All' the Government's five year housing plan for England. Paragraphs 5.18 to 5.21 of that document set out the Government's choice based lettings policy objectives.

These objectives are:

- To make it as easy as possible for applicants and tenants to move between local authority, housing association and privately owned accommodation by encouraging the extension of choice-based lettings to cover low cost home ownership options and properties for rent from private landlords, as well as social housing;
- To develop choice based lettings schemes on a regional and/or sub regional basis, recognising that housing markets do not follow local authority boundaries;
- To support prospective applicants to choose the housing option which is best for them, including promoting a wide range of options within the district (including low cost home ownership, mutual exchange, the private sector); providing information about 'staying put' options such as aids and adaptations; mobility schemes, including moves from high to low demand areas; property shops and housing advice centres.

Environmental

More sustainable communities and potentially better managed estates.

Equalities and Diversity

See Sect 8. above

13. **OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Please include the following table and indicate 'Yes' or 'No' as appropriate. Delete the words in italics.

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Corporate Director (Services)	Yes
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal & Democratic Services	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR	Yes
Corporate Procurement Team	Yes

14. **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Proposed Sub Regional Choice Based Banding Model

15. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

CONTACT OFFICER

Name: A.M. Coel
E Mail: a.coel@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Tel: (01527) 881270

APPENDIX 1

PROPOSED SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS BANDING MODEL

Priority Card (Time limit of 3 months)

This relates to statutory homeless cases.
Applicants are prioritised in registration date order.
All applicants interviewed / visited.

Band 1 (Time Limit of 6 months)

This includes applicants with a local connection who have higher priority housing needs.
Applicants are prioritised in registration date order.
All applicants interviewed / visited.

Band 2 (Time Limit of 12 months)

This includes applicants with a local connection who have lower priority housing needs.
Applicants are prioritised in registration date order.
All applicants interviewed / visited.

Band 3 (Time Limit of 6 months)

This includes applicants with no local connection who have higher priority housing needs.
Applicants are prioritised in registration date order.
All applicants interviewed.

Band 4 (Time Limit of 12 months)

This includes applicants with no local connection who have lower priority housing needs.
Applicants are prioritised in registration date order.
All applicants interviewed.

Band 5 (No time limit applied)

This includes applicants with a local connection with no qualifying housing need.
Applicants are prioritised in registration date order.
No interviews / visits unless requested or prior to allocation.

Band 6 (No time limit applied)

This includes applicants with no local connection with no qualifying housing

need.

Applicants are ordered in registration date order.

No interviews / visits unless requested or prior to allocation.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The detail of the eligibility criteria for the different bands is set out below;

Priority Card – (granted for 3 months but can be extended at BDHT's discretion)

- The Housing Needs team at BDHT has investigated your case and accepted that you are homeless and that Bromsgrove District Council has a statutory duty to help you.

Priority will be awarded to assist applicants in crisis i.e. statutorily homeless to be re-housed.

Band 1 – (granted for 6 months – needs to be reapplied for)

You have a local connection to Bromsgrove District and:

- You are homeless and you normally live in the Bromsgrove District, even where there is no statutory duty for re-housing. This excludes people who are intentionally homeless.
- You have been given a Notice to Quit or a Repossession Order through no fault of your own.
- You have a severe medical problem that is directly affected by your current home which would be immediately improved by moving.
- Bromsgrove District Council's Private Sector Housing Team has declared that your home is unfit to live in.

Band 2 – (granted for 12 months – needs to be reapplied for)

You have a local connection to Bromsgrove District and:

- The Housing Needs team at BDHT has investigated your case and accepted that you are in priority need but are intentionally homeless.
- Your home in the Bromsgrove District is overcrowded, and the Council's Private Sector Team has confirmed this.
- Social need for housing in exceptional circumstances – only given at the discretion of the panel.
- You are suffering harassment / domestic violence which has been confirmed by the Housing Needs team.
- You have a child under 10 and live in a flat that is not on the ground floor.

Band 3 – (granted for 6 months – needs to be reapplied for)

You have no local connection to Bromsgrove District and:

- You are homeless and you normally live in the Bromsgrove District, even where there is no statutory duty for re-housing. This excludes people who intentionally homeless.
- You have been given a Notice to Quit or a Repossession Order through no fault of your own.
- You have a severe medical problem that is directly affected by your current home which would be immediately improved by moving.
- Bromsgrove Council's Private Sector Team has declared that your home is unfit to live in.

Band 4 – (granted for 12 months – needs to reapplied for)

You have no local connection to Bromsgrove District and:

- The Housing Needs team at BDHT have investigated your case and accepted that you are in priority need but intentionally homeless.
- Your home is overcrowded, and the Council's Private Sector Team has confirmed this.
- Social need for housing in exceptional circumstances – only given at the discretion of the panel.
- You are suffering harassment / domestic violence which has been confirmed by the Housing Needs Team.
- You have a child under 10 and live in a flat that is not on the ground floor.

Band 5

You have a local connection to Bromsgrove District and you are:

- Not eligible for Band 1 or 2 due to your housing circumstances.

Band 6

You have no local connection to Bromsgrove District and you are:

- Not eligible for Band 3 or 4 due to your housing circumstances

Local Connection as Defined by the Housing Act 1996 Section 199

1. A person has a local connection with the district of a local housing authority if he has a connection with it:
 - a) because he is, or in the past was, normally resident there, and that residence is or was of his own choice,
 - b) because he is employed there
 - c) because of family associations, or
 - d) because of special circumstances.
2. A person is not employed in a district if he is serving in the regular armed forces of the Crown.

3. Residence in a district is not of a person's own choice if –

- a) he becomes a resident there because he, or a person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, is serving in the regular armed forces of the Crown, or
- b) he, or a person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, becomes resident there because he is detained under the authority of an Act of Parliament.