

## **Choice Based Lettings (CBL) - Adoption of New Sub-regional Housing Allocations Policy**

### **Summary**

1. This report introduces a new Sub-regional Housing Allocations Policy and seeks Executive approval to adopt this policy, with effect from the introduction of a new choice based lettings scheme, for the allocation of the City of York Councils housing stock, planned for Autumn 2010.

### **Background**

2. CBL is an initiative to make the lettings of social housing more market and customer orientated. The main principles underpinning any system are: -
  - The initiative is taken by the customer
  - There is market information for the customer
  - There is property and neighbourhood information available to the customer
  - There will be a system in place to support vulnerable households
  - Applicants will still have to meet eligibility and selection criteria
3. CBL has a simplified letting criteria, which allows customers to express an interest in an individual property which has been openly advertised, offers are made to customers in the greatest housing need who have bid for a property and meet the eligibility criteria for a particular property.
4. City of York Council currently operates a limited CBL scheme and has been operating this since May 2006. Under the current scheme properties which are classed as difficult to let, because of either property type or location are let via CBL. A small number of properties that are not on the CBL list are also let via CBL, the criteria applied here is where they are refused 3 or more times.
5. In October 2007, the four political group leaders considered a report which recommended that City of York Council be party to a sub-regional funding bid to develop a sub-regional approach to CBL. This recommendation was agreed with the following caveats:
  - Each individual LA agreeing to CBL through their political structures;
    - *the purpose of this report is for CYC to approve the policy.*

- Each LA to agree the release the appropriate level of match funding;
    - *Each LA area has provided £30k match funding.*
  - For LA's, where they feel it is appropriate, to consultation with existing tenants and applicants.
    - *details of how consultation was carried out is included within the body of the report.*
6. Following the agreement to be part of the sub-regional bid, City of York Council, along with Scarborough BC, Hambleton DC, Ryedale DC, Selby DC, Craven DC & Richmondshire DC and where appropriate their partner Housing Associations, have successfully bid for funding (£227k) from central government to develop and implement a sub-regional CBL scheme. This funding has been matched with £30k per local authority area.
  7. A project board has been established, chaired by the City of York Council's Head of Housing which, over the last 12 months has lead the development of the proposed new policy. Representatives from all local authorities have been involved and had the ability to influence all aspects of the policy development. The policy is attached at Annex A.
  8. The policy is introduced with a number of checks and balances. Applicants with a local connection to the partnership area will receive priority over those without. Given that the policy is a sub-regional one, local connection is to the partnership area, not individual local authorities. This will result in applicants from outside of CYC's boundaries being eligible for housing within York, and potentially having priority over applicants from York. However, the reverse is also applicable, and applicants from York will be able to access homes outside of CYC's boundaries. Cross boundary mobility within North Yorkshire will be carefully monitored to ensure that no one area experiences unacceptable levels of net inward migration.
  9. Applicants with housing related debt of unacceptable levels will be overlooked for allocation until they have demonstrated a strong commitment to repayment. Where applicants have similar levels of housing need, applicants without housing debt will receive priority.

### **Consultation**

10. A consultation plan was drawn up and a formal consultation period established from 27th July to 31st October 2009. An equalities impact screening identified a number of specialist groups that needed to be involved and the consultation plan included these and other key stakeholders and organisations.
11. Within York, all applicants on the waiting list were sent a guide to the scheme, an invitation to a local event and a questionnaire to complete and return. Two formal consultation events were held, one at Acomb Explore and one at CVS on Priory Street.
12. Executive / Cabinet Members and RSL Board Members of the partners were invited to a seminar on 30 July 2009 to discuss and comment on the draft policy. Within York the then Shadow Exec Member was also briefed on the draft policy. A full report on the consultation exercise can be provided upon request.

## Options

13. Option One - The Executive approves the policy attached at Annex 1 for the allocation of CYC Housing Stock, effective from the introduction of a full CBL scheme later in 2010.
14. Option Two - The Executive does not approve the use of the policy.

## Analysis

15. **Option One** – The Council, via the leaders group, has previously endorsed the principal of the councils adopting a CBL scheme for the allocation of all its housing stock via a sub-regional policy.
16. Adoption of the policy would significantly improve choice for customers and streamline the allocations process. Applicants would be pro-actively choosing where they wanted to live through expressing an interest (bidding) for particular properties. Safeguards would be available to ensure those few applicants who through ill health / vulnerability would not be able to bid, are not disadvantaged.
17. The introduction of the scheme will also provide significant benefits to applicants, and by default CYC. The applicant will only have to complete one application form for housing within any of the seven local authorities and their partner landlords. Whilst not quantifiable, this will result in reduced administration for CYC. The scheme will also have an on-line application form which will enable applicants to complete the form themselves which can then be uploaded.
18. The policy as attached at annex one, is a joint policy and as such can not be amended by one partner. Given this, the option is to agree the policy or not, there is not option for members to change specific elements of the policy at this stage, (member in-put was via the consultation process as previously outlined). However, it is proposed that the policy is periodically reviewed, initially after 12 months to ensure it is meeting the required outcomes. Member input will be crucial to the successful evaluation of the policy and any subsequent amendments.
19. **Option Two** – If the Executive decides not approve the policy, the council would continue to allocate its housing stock via the current allocations policy and reactive allocations scheme.
20. Choosing this option would result in a loss of funding, CYC has provided £30k match funding to support the development and implementation of the scheme. To deliver CBL on our own it would cost significantly more than £30k we have invested. We would also lose access to the £227k government funding that has been provided to support the development and implementation of the scheme.
21. There would also be a significant reputation impact on the council as a leader of customer focused service provision. CYC is the lead authority within the sub-regional scheme, and as a result has significantly raised our profile with CLG.

## Corporate Priorities

22. The adoption of CBL and the new sub-regional approach and policy, clearly supports the council's corporate strategy, in particular the Inclusive City and Effective Organisation priorities.,

## Implications

23. The implications arising from this report are:
24. **Financial** – The costs of developing the sub-regional approach to CBL, including the development of the policy, purchase and implementation of the IT system is covered by government grant from CLG and the £30k match funding from each local authority. CYC's £30k match funding was allocated as part of the 2009/10 budget process and as such is already in place.
25. **Equalities** - Member will see from the draft policy that equalities issues are central to the success of the scheme, and have been carefully considered in the policy development. Representatives from the third sector, NYCC & CYC Adult Services and the PCT sit on the project's Equalities Monitoring Group who has overseen the equalities impact assessment and will continue to monitor and address any adverse impact of the scheme on vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities or those living in rural communities.
26. **Information Technology (IT)** – Given that the scheme is a sub-regional scheme a common IT system is required. An initial decision by the CBL project group was to procure a common IT system. The system which will be purchased is a stand alone system called Abritas. This is being purchased via the Northern Housing Consortium. Interfaces between the Housing Landlord World system and Abritas will be required, this work is already built into the Housing Service IT Plan.
27. **Crime and Disorder** - The allocations policy provides for the exclusion of applicants who fail the 'acceptable behaviour test' from the Register. In this way applicants who will pose a significant threat to the safety and stability of communities can be prevented from accessing CYC's accommodation.
28. **Legal** - Housing allocations is governed by part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, and statutory guidance relating both to housing allocations (Fair and Flexible - December 2009) and Choice Based Lettings (August 2008). CYC as the lead organisation for the partnership have arranged for the policy has been reviewed by Zenith Chambers, who have confirmed it to be in accordance with both the statute and the guidance.
29. There are no **Property, Human Resources (HR), or Other** implications.

## Risk Management

30. The risks associated with the proposals in this report are low and score less than 16. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy there are no direct risks.

## Recommendations

31. The Executive are asked to:

- a) Approve option 1 of the report as set out in Para 13, to approve the policy attached at Annex 1 for the allocation of CYC Housing Stock, effective from the introduction of a full CBL scheme later in 2010.
- b) To delegate to the Head of Housing Service authority to make minor amendments to the policy which do not fundamentally alter the core principals of the policy itself.

Reason: To ensure that the council has an effective allocations policy and to ensure that opportunities for improvements in customer service and organisational efficiencies are maximised.

## Contact Details

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<b>Wards Affected:</b>		<b>All</b>	✓
For further information please contact the author of the report			

## Background Papers:

**All relevant background papers must be listed here.**

Briefing Paper to Group Leaders – October 2007

## Annexes

Sub-Regional Allocations Policy