

Cabinet

4 December 2008



Common Lettings Policy Key Decision BSE/EN/18/08

Report of John Richardson, Corporate Director, Environment Cabinet Portfolio Member – Councillor Neil Foster

Introduction

- 1 In accordance with the provisions of Section 167 of the Housing Act 1996 every Local Authority should have an Allocations Scheme for determining priorities and a procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation. Local Authorities must also have regard to the statutory Code of Guidance issued under the provisions of this Act. In addition, there is a Government expectation that all Authorities will have in place a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme by 2010. The term "Choice Based Lettings Scheme" means that an authority has adopted allocation policies and procedures which incorporate an advertising scheme. There is a need for a single Allocations Policy to be adopted by the new Unitary Authority by Vesting Day.

Background

- 2 Currently all the District Councils in County Durham have their own Allocations Policy and associated procedures for allocating their housing stock. In response to the Government's expectation that all Authorities operate a Choice Based Lettings Scheme by 2010 representatives from the District Councils, and their associated Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) organisations and Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) where appropriate, formed a CBL Partnership in 2005 and have been working towards implementing a sub-regional CBL scheme across County Durham in April 2009. In advance of the county-wide scheme going live East Durham Homes (EDH) has been operating the CBL scheme as a pathfinder in the District of Easington since April 2008.

Current Position

- 3 A sub-group of the CBL Partnership has drafted a common CBL Policy in accordance with the requirements of existing legislation, codes of guidance and best practice. There have been two engagement events with stakeholders and ongoing consultation with customers across County Durham. The proposed Common Lettings Policy (attached as Appendix 2) has been considered and agreed by the CBL Partnership Board, Durham Housing and Neighbourhood Group and the Housing Workstream. An Equalities Impact Assessment is being organised and will be undertaken in the next few weeks.

Next Steps

- 4 Existing partners have already entered into a contract with the IT provider, Abrisas, as they currently operate the scheme at East Durham Homes. It is the intention that Abrisas will facilitate the extension of the CBL Scheme across County Durham and will also provide the IT system to operate the Common Housing Register and Common Lettings Policy for the new Unitary Authority. In order to develop the IT systems ready for implementation of the Common Housing Register and the Common Lettings Policy by 1 April 2009 and to carry out the necessary re-registration of applicants the Common Allocation Policy needs to be agreed by the new Unitary Authority as soon as possible.

Risk

- 5 A risk assessment has been carried out and is attached at Appendix 2.

Recommendation

- 6 The Common Lettings Policy, as attached at Appendix 3, be approved and that officers continue to work towards implementation of the Common Lettings Policy, the Common Housing Register and the CBL scheme across County Durham by 1 April 2009.

Background Papers

Durham Key Options Choice Based Lettings

Contact: Mike Clark, LGR Housing Workstream Lead – 01207 218440

Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

(Does the decision impact upon a future Unitary Council?)

Yes

Finance

Costs contained within existing budgets

Staffing

Accounted for in LGR staffing proposals

Equality and Diversity

Impact assessed

Accommodation

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Sustainability

None

Human Rights

Compliant with legislation

Localities and Rurality

Area based with local sensitivity

Young People

None

Consultation

Currently being undertaken

Health

Positive impact

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment for Key Decision

Risk Description	Potential Impact	Treatment (if not already in place, state implementation date)	Risk Owner
The Council may be unable to deliver one or more of its corporate objectives if the recommendation is not implemented.	Delay in delivering a 'must have' for Vesting Day 1st April 2009	Existing service arrangements maintained and managed by Head of Service through existing partnership.	Mike Clark, LGR Housing Workstream Lead
Not implementing the recommendation may result in failure to maximise the benefits of working with others in a joined-up manner.	Some service disruption for a limited period	Delay in letting properties can be instigated by short-term arrangements.	Mike Clark, LGR Housing Workstream Lead
Failure to implement the recommendation within the proposed timescale. This may be caused by unrealistic timescales, external factors impacting the timescale, lack of commitment of resources or delays in the tendering process.	I.T. system and software not in place/fully functioning by Vesting Day	Existing registers can be maintained until data transferred. Expenditure level agreed.	Mike Clark, LGR Housing Workstream Lead
Insufficient number of skilled staff available within the Council to deliver the recommendation.	Staff make mistakes on either registration, assessment or lettings arrangements	Training schedule being developed <u>BUT</u> subject to appointments.	Mike Clark, LGR Housing Workstream Lead
The quality of service delivery may be adversely impacted during any transition period.	Due to software/I.T. or staff development/training delays	See above	Mike Clark, LGR Housing Workstream Lead