

CHESHIRE EAST

Places Advisory Panel

Date: 16th December 2008

Title: Cheshire Homechoice Common Allocations Policy

1. Purpose of Report: To update the Places Advisory Panel on the implementation of Choice Based Lettings and to seek approval for the Cheshire homechoice common allocations policy to be progressed to Cabinet for adoption.

2. Decision Required: To give permission to progress the Cheshire homechoice common allocations policy to Cabinet for adoption.

3. Financial Implications: Each of the six partners have committed financial resources in order to implement Choice Based Lettings, this includes the procurement of an ICT system. There will be a requirement for an ongoing financial commitment in order to maintain the ICT system and to cover revenue costs, which will be approximately £16,340 per year from each partner.

4. Summary:

Communities and Local Government's (CLG) five year housing plan, *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*, published in January 2005, set out the Government's plans for taking forward its Choice Based Lettings policy. They have tasked all English local authorities to adopt Choice Based Lettings by 2010 and have regard to include housing association properties, low cost home ownership and privately rented properties.

Choice Based Lettings is different from the traditional way of allocating housing via the waiting list. It allows customers the ability to choose where they want to live. Vacant properties are advertised via a web-based system across the partnership. Customers are given the opportunity to express an interest in any home, which meets their household's needs. Priority will be given to those with the most urgent need and who have waited the longest.

A partnership was formed in June 2005 to look at ways in which authorities could work together to meet the governments target to implement choice by 2010, provide a better service to customers and create efficiency savings. There were originally 9 partners, 3 of which took the strategic decision to leave the partnership, following the announcement of LGR, leaving the following members:-

- Macclesfield Borough Council
- Cheshire Peaks & Plain.
- Congleton Borough Council
- Dane Housing
- Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council
- Wulvern Housing

In September 2006 the Local Authority Partners submitted a bid for CLG funding to develop a Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings scheme, which was successful. A grant of £106,000 was awarded in January 2007 to assist in the development costs of the Cheshire Sub-regional CBL scheme.

The partnership has completed a number of milestones in order to move towards the implementation of the scheme. These include:

- Establishing a name (Cheshire homechoice) and branding for the scheme.
- Signing of the Partnering Agreement.
- The development and consultation of the common allocations policy.
- The development of a specification for the ICT system.

The development of a common allocations policy was agreed with the overall aim to ensure that all social and affordable housing is allocated fairly and objectively to those in the greatest housing need, having regard to any legislative requirements and Codes of Guidance issued by the CLG. The common allocations policy outlines how customers can apply for housing. They are asked to complete a common housing application form in order to correctly identify the housing priority for each customer.

The existing allocations policies operated by the partners currently are all points based. The common allocations policy moves away from this traditional way of assessing priority need to a system of star ratings. Under the new policy applicants are placed into six priority bands ranging from one star for the lowest priority to five stars plus for the most urgent levels of housing need.

The common allocations policy explains how customer's housing need will be assessed and where additional priority may be awarded. Additional priority may be awarded in the following circumstances:

- Homeless.
- Medical grounds.
- Welfare grounds.
- Overcrowding.
- Under occupied.
- Disrepair.
- Insecure Accommodation.
- Lacking of basic facilities.

Consultation on the common allocations policy was undertaken throughout the partnership area between 14th July and 14th October 2008. Approval for the policy is now been requested from the Boards and Executives of all partner organisations.

Implementation of the new Cheshire homechoice scheme is scheduled to take place in May/June 2009 and will therefore be launched after "Vesting Day", approval and adoption of the policy is therefore sought from the Cheshire East Cabinet.

For further information:-

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