

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

CABINET

Date of the meeting: 24 March 2009

Report of: Places

Title: Cheshire Homechoice Common Allocations Policy

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Cheshire East Cabinet on the amendments made to the Cheshire homechoice common allocations policy to take into account local connection to rural areas and seek adoption of the policy.

2.0 Decision Required

- 2.1 Adoption of the Cheshire homechoice common allocations policy.

3.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs

- 3.1 No implications for transition costs

4.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond

- 4.1 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 £20,100 per year from each partner.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 local authorities are required to have an allocations policy and procedure in place in order to allocate social housing and under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002) to make provision for homeless households.

6.0 Risk Assessment

- 6.1 The adoption of a common allocations policy will ensure that there is a consistent approach to the allocation of social housing across the partnership. The development and adoption of an allocations policy is an

fundamental part of the project plan and without a policy in place the implementation of choice based lettings cannot take place.

- 6.2 The Government have tasked all local authorities to implement choice based lettings by 2010. The project is currently on target to meet this timescale, however any delays in the process will jeopardise this.

7.0 Background and Options

- 7.1 The Government require that all local authorities implement choice based lettings by 2010. Cheshire East will not itself own, let or manage any of the social housing stock within the area but still has responsibilities for ensuring that households in housing need have those needs met. These will be achieved through the Cheshire homechoice partnership.
- 7.2 The proposed common allocation policy was presented to members at the Places Advisory Panel on the 16th December 2009. Councillors expressed concern over the ability of people living within certain rural settlements to access housing within those communities. In particular, the likelihood of applicants not connected to the community but in housing need receiving offers because of their higher priority. As a result, the Common Allocation Policy was not progressed to cabinet for adoption.
- 7.3 Officers have now investigated and assessed the options that might be available to address these issues and are putting forward an amended policy. The Cheshire homechoice Project Board have now agreed amendments that will help to meet the concerns of elected members, the Boards of the partner Housing Associations and the needs of legislation.
- 7.4 The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002 dictates that Local Authority lettings schemes give an overall priority to households in certain types of housing need (the “reasonable preference” categories) These are set out in the policy document and form the basis of the priority banding scheme. Whilst there is no requirement to let all available properties to households in these categories, the Cheshire East will be required to ensure that:
- Non “reasonable preference” lets do not dominate the scheme
 - Any additional criteria incorporated within the policy does not indirectly result in restrictions to housing being placed on groups covered by equality legislation
 - Cheshire East’s legal duties to secure accommodation for certain households are not compromised, in practice, this means ensuring that they receive sufficient priority and choice for social housing within the area

- Those in housing need are able to exercise a significant amount of choice in terms of quality and location when seeking a socially rented home

7.5 The following amendments to the policy have been made:

7.6 **Community connection:** The Project Board have added a category of “community connection” in order to address the needs of those that wish to remain within their existing communities but where stock turnover and the availability of properties is low.

7.7 Under this provision, landlords may advertise their properties in rural communities (fewer than 3,000 population) for those with a connection to that settlement. Those qualifying bids that are received will be prioritised in line with the needs bands as set out in the policy. The proportion of lets advertised in this way will be determined by monitoring the number of lets to ensure that the rules concerning reasonable preference are met.

7.8 In addition to the “community connection” category the Project Board have concluded that the five star plus category had the potential to give certain groups too much preference within the scheme, and have therefore taken the decision that its removal would result in a fairer and more balanced scheme.

7.9 There are a number of additional references within the policy affecting community lettings including:

7.10 **Unacceptable behaviour:** The policy includes a capacity to exclude for all consideration those that have engaged in criminal or anti social behaviour. This will be invoked in all appropriate cases in order to ensure that those that may present a risk to community stability are not re-housed by the partnership. Although no changes have been made to the policy itself. Officers are committed to developing effective assessment procedures prior to implementation of the policy.

7.11 **Priority Banding:** The priority banding scheme incorporates the ability to give reasonable preference to those that can demonstrate a need to move into or remain within a given community in order to prevent or alleviate hardship. This includes needing to give, or receive care, support and employment. This provision applied to all areas and is not limited to rural populations of fewer than 3,000.

8.0 Overview of Day One, Year One and Term One Issues

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

9.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 9.1 The recommendation is to adopt the Cheshire homechoice common allocations policy to ensure that choice based lettings is progressed to implementation in order to meet the Government target of 2010.

For further information:

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Background Documents:

Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, Cheshire CW1 1HZ

*Documents are available for inspection at: Cheshire homechoice common allocations policy: **amendments highlighted in red.***



"Amended Common
Allocation Policy Vers