
CHOICE BASED LETTINGS – PROGRESS REPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress being made with regard to the implementation of a Choice Based Lettings scheme in the District.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 As part of “homes for all” the Government’s five year housing plan, there is a requirement for local authorities to have implemented a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme by 2010. CBL provides an alternative to traditional systems for allocating social rented housing as, instead of allocating properties as part of an administrative process, it requires more participation by applicants in “bidding” (or expressing an interest) for properties.
- 2.2 A report was presented to Community Services Committee on 5 September 2006, explaining the principle of CBL and in particular, about the possibility and potential benefits of working in partnership with the other Thames Gateway Local Authorities in developing a Sub Regional CBL scheme.
- 2.3 As a result of this report, Members agreed to support a joint bid by the authorities within the Thames Gateway South Essex Sub Region to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), for funding to assist in the development and implementation of this Sub Regional scheme.
- 2.4 The bid was successful in levering in £96,000 for this purpose, which was based on 60% of the estimated total projected cost.

3 PROGRESS TO DATE

- 3.1 Officers from each of the Thames Gateway authorities have been meeting on a regular basis to discuss and progress the options for CBL within the region, and utilising the funding from DCLG, appointed a CBL coordinator to project manage its development. Unfortunately the coordinator left in September, with a consultant being employed for a couple of months prior to Christmas. Progress of CBL has been monitored through the Thames Gateway Strategic Housing Member Group attended by Councillor Gordon.
- 3.2 The development work that has been carried out by the co-ordinator has included research into the available CBL systems on the market, writing of a draft sub regional lettings policy, specifications for procuring such a scheme and discussion around specific areas such as cross border nominations, etc.
- 3.3 It would be fair to say that, at present, the progress of the development of a sub regional scheme has significantly slowed, primarily due to the fact that all the authorities have very different views on what systems are appropriate, what systems they are currently operating, or other influencing factors within their own authority.

- 3.4 With regard to these differences, there is a summary of each of the Authority's current situation in connection with CBL. Thurrock already have their own system in place that is reasonably detailed and considered to comply with the various elements required within any CBL scheme. Basildon are also operating a scheme which they have developed themselves and will need to assess its ability to comply with all the CBL requirements.
- 3.5 Southend has recently decided to purchase their own scheme (believed to be the Abritas Scheme), but Castle Point are not keen to commit to a particular system until their LSVT process has been completed. Through various discussions, it has been mentioned that there may be the possibility of other authorities "bolting on" to Southend's new system, although the precise details around this option, including cost and the extent of the linkage, have yet to be confirmed.
- 3.6 Within our own section, we are currently in the process of developing the system that manages the Housing Register Allocations process and this work, which is to be implemented by Spring 2008, will need to include identifying with which CBL systems it can be most effectively integrated.
- 3.7 One of the specific discussion points that has so far been difficult to gain agreement on between the Thames Gateway South Essex authorities, is that of cross border nominations, and in particular, what numbers or percentages should be used in any sub regional scheme. Decisions on this issue will need to be made as part of the overall scheme development, with Members able to decide on what specific number of properties they wish to be put up for cross border nomination.

4 THE WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 Through monitoring the progress of the sub regional scheme, the DCLG have recently contacted authorities within the Thames Gateway suggesting some further meetings, including on an individual basis if requested, to discuss how the implementation of CBL can be pushed forward. These meetings are likely to take place in April.
- 4.2 It is felt that the way Rochford's housing nominations are currently managed, residents on the housing register already receive an element of choice in the process. Therefore officers are keen to meet with DCLG representatives to discuss whether or not the current scheme could be developed further to meet the requirements of CBL, and if so, to identify the specific measures needed to fully comply.
- 4.3 Officers from the Thames Gateway authorities are continuing to meet in order to explore thoroughly all possibilities of partnership working on CBL. The Key Actions and Policies report identifies that a further report will be brought back to the Executive Board in September/October, with final proposals on what sort of scheme is to be implemented. Implementation would commence from January/February 2009.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is currently £30,000 allocated in the 2008/9 budget for the development and implementation of a Choice Based Lettings scheme.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Board **RESOLVES** to note the content of this report with regard to the implementation of a Choice Based Lettings scheme and to await a further report in September/October detailing final scheme proposals.

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Background Papers:-

None

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