

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director Partnerships, Planning & Policy, Lesley-ann Fenton (Introduced by the Executive Member (Business))	Executive Cabinet	18 <sup>th</sup> February 2010

## SUB REGIONAL ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND CHOICE BASED LETTING PROCEDURE (SELECTMOVE)

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To present the Sub Regional Allocations Policy and Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings (CBL) procedure.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

- That Sub-Regional Allocations Policy and Choice Based letting procedure (Select Move) be adopted as Chorley Council allocations Scheme and procedure subject to consultation.

### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

#### (If the recommendations are accepted)

- Introducing a Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme would provide greater choice and access to housing.
- Communities and Local Government's five year housing plan, *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*, sets out the Government's plans for taking forward its Choice Based Lettings policy, there is a target by 2010 for all Local Authorities and Housing Associations to be operating a CBL scheme
- Adopting a CBL scheme would ensure a simple, transparent process for households applying for housing while giving them a more active role in choosing where they live.
- It would simplify the application process for households when applying for housing, enabling them to make one application for all partners.

### ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- Option 1 – Do nothing.** This would result in the Council continuing with its current housing allocations policy and housing register. Whilst, in the short term, there is no legal requirement to change these arrangements, the Council would fail to meet the Government target if it did not implement some form of CBL scheme this year. Local households would be deprived of expressing choice in where they live. There is potential that wider Sub Regional relationships could be damaged if the Council decided to opt out of the scheme and partnership.

8. **Option 2 – Developing a localised CBL scheme.** This would have the advantages of local control and policy development, and would still meet the Government's basic CBL target. However, a localised scheme would contradict Government guidance, restrict mobility for households and would be significantly more expensive to implement due to lost economies of scale. There is potential that wider relationships could be damaged if the Council decided to opt out of a Sub-Regional CBL Partnership.

The determination of the Government's grant for CBL was issued towards costs incurred by entering into a Sub-Regional CBL, therefore, this could be at risk.

## CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 9 This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the Central Lancashire sub-region		Develop local solutions to climate change.	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chances	✓	Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	✓
Involving people in their communities	✓	Ensure Chorley Borough Council is a performing organization	

## BACKGROUND

- 10 CBL was first introduced by the Government in the 2002 Housing Act and is outlined in the former officer of the Deputy Prime Minister five-year plan, Sustainable Communities: Homes for All. A CBL scheme allows people to apply for social housing vacancies, which are advertised through various mediums, rather than waiting for an organisation to identify their need and preference through the waiting list.
11. The Government's policy objectives is for the CBL schemes to develop on a regional or sub-regional basis, involving partnerships of local authorities, RSLs and, where possible, private sector landlords in order to achieve the greatest choice and flexibility in meeting housing need.

Advantages of larger cross-authority schemes are as follows:

the provision of a larger pool of available housing, giving people more choice and helping ease localised problems of high demand.

breaking down artificial boundaries and recognising existing housing and labour markets addressing wordlessness and offering greater mobility

reducing complexities and costs associated with RSLs being involved in a number of different schemes; and

partners are able to share the costs associated in developing CBL schemes

- 12 Preston Council, South Ribble and RSL partners launched their sub regional scheme in July 2007 which has been successfully operating since. The partnership introduced a common housing register and allocations policy, it enables partners to make best use of their housing stock and widened the scope for lettings and transfers across local authority boundaries while reducing the need for households to apply to each individual organisation.

13. The Council has been working with South Ribble and Preston Council and Local Registered landlords (RSLs) in developing an allocations policy that will be applied across all three council areas. Chorley's current allocations policy informed the final draft of the Sub-Regional SelectMove policy, all partners have agreed a 5 band allocations policy. Chorley is successfully assessing applicants against the 5 band scheme, therefore, transition to the Selectmove policy can take place efficiently.
14. Following assessment, eligible applicants will be put into five priority bands for housing, based on their circumstances. The bands will be as follows:
  - a. **A band:** This band is for applicants who are in urgent need and given additional preference. This category would include, for example, applicants with a serious medical condition, households who are defined as statutorily overcrowded in the Housing Act 2004, households in unsanitary accommodation or 16 and 17 year old care leavers who are threatened with homelessness.
  - b. **B band:** This band is for applicants who are high need and are given reasonable preference. It would include, for example, homeless households who are owed the full homeless duty, or applicants living in unsatisfactory housing that lack basic facilities.
  - c. **C band:** This band is for applicants who have recognisable need and are given reasonable preference. This would include, non-priority homeless applicants or applicants aged over 60 who are seeking sheltered accommodation.
  - d. **D band:** This band is for applicants who are assessed as owed reasonable preference, but who have reduced preference under the policy due to rent arrears, behaviour, no local connections, savings, equity or earnings, or where two offers have been refused. This band also includes those who are not in any of the reasonable preference groups, however they meet a recognised 'community' criteria as specified within the policy. This will include applicants who can demonstrate having a good tenancy history and/or positive contribution to the local community including volunteering or membership to a local community group.
  - e. **E band:** This band is for applicants with no recognisable housing need. This is for all other applicants who do not qualify for the other bands, but would like to move to alternative accommodation.

The Select Move banding currently matches Chorley's allocations policy approved by Executive Cabinet in October 2009.

15. Within the Sub Regionally policy, quotas have been proposed for each band, setting out percentages of properties per reasonable preference group. This enables all applicants to have access to available housing, reducing lengthy waiting times. The Council will work closely with RSLs to inform and monitor adequate proportioning to continue to address households in housing need.

**Band A 40%**  
**Band B 30%**  
**Band C 15%**  
**Band D 10%**  
**Band E 5%**

The Council will be reviewing this proportion every 12 months.

16. The finalised Allocations Policy is included as Appendix 1 of this report

## **Lettings Criteria**

17. Applicants who join the Select Move Scheme will be placed in one of five bands to reflect their housing need.
- Vacant properties that become available under the Choice Based Lettings Scheme will be advertised weekly via a number of methods eg: web based kiosks and partner receptions etc. A lettings cycle will start on midnight Friday and will end at 12am the following Wednesday. No expressions of interest will be allowed on the Thursday or Friday at the end of a lettings cycle. Lettings cycles may be changed to reflect public holidays.
  - Applicants can only express an interest (bid) in homes advertised which they are eligible for. For instance, they must meet the property criteria (i.e. any age restrictions, local letting policy).
  - There will be no restriction on the number of expressions of interest (bids) for properties.
  - Once the deadline of the advertising cycle is reached, a shortlist of the applicants who have expressed an interest is provided by the IT system Abrisas.
  - For each property the Abrisas software will run a unique list of applicants, the applicant who is deemed suitable and who has been waiting the longest period of time in this band will receive a formal offer.
  - Applicant refusing suitable properties may lose their additional priority for housing and placed in a lower band.

### **Migration**

18. It is not envisaged there will be a great percentage of migration between boundaries, Preston and South Ribble have indicated that migration experienced has been very low and below 10%. To manage cross boundary movement Chorley have made it a condition of joining the scheme that a cap of 10% on migration be set down to safe guard local people and Chorley's limited social housing stock.

Chorley will also be using local lettings policies in specific areas, estates and newly developed affordable units that are created through the affordable housing delivery, in the interest of balanced and sustainable communities, working in partnership with the RSLs.

### **Cross Tenure**

19. Chorley Council shares Selectmove aspiration to include Low Cost Home Ownership options within the scheme. The Council currently manages its own Low Cost Home Ownership scheme. These properties are made available to applicants who can demonstrate that they are in need for affordable housing. Also, It is the intention to offer good quality private sector rented accommodation through the CBL scheme working together with housing management and the implementation of a robust accreditation scheme.

### **Consultation**

20. Subject to Cabinets approval Chorley will be consulting with partners and stakeholders i.e. Social services, Probation, Temporary Accommodation providers etc, It is recommend that the final policy is approved by the Executive Member. We do not anticipate any objections to the scheme although in the event of any serious objection by partners or stakeholders we will report these concerns back to Cabinet.

### **Risk**

21. The Council would be at risk of reducing ratings within future inspection programmes and the Comprehensive Area Assessment if it fails to implement policies to promote the Governments choice agenda in housing.

### IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

22. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Corporate Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	√	No significant implications in this area	

### COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF GOVERNANCE

23. The proposal meets the Council's obligations.

LESLEY-ANN FENTON  
 Director, Partnerships, Planning & Policy.

There are no background papers to this report.

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