

Subject: Pennine Lancashire Choice Based Lettings Scheme
Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 19th March 2008

Report of: Head of Regeneration

Portfolio

Holder: Regenerating and Promoting Rossendale

Key Decision: Yes

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To outline the current situation regarding the development of a Pennine Lancashire Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- 1.2 To seek delegated authority for the Director of Regulatory Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration to sign a memorandum of understanding between the relevant parties.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objective.
- Delivering Quality Services to Customers (Customers, Improvement)
 - Delivering Regeneration across the Borough (Economy, Housing)
 - Promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live and visit (Economy)
 - Improving health and well being across the Borough (Health, Housing)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- There is Risk of reducing CPA/CAA rating should nothing done about introducing a Choice Based Lettings system.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 Communities and Local Government (CLG) is committed to ensuring that social housing tenants have more choice and control over where they live. They believe this is the best way to build communities that are stable, viable and inclusive. CLG want to see schemes developed which span local authority boundaries and which bring together all social landlords in an area to offer the widest possible housing choices for tenants and applicants.

4.2 The *Homelessness Act 2002* - which revises the legislation governing the allocation of social housing by local authorities - includes a provision to facilitate the introduction of "advertising schemes". The 2002 Act also requires authorities to include a statement in their allocation scheme about their position on offering choice to applicants. The revised *Code of Guidance on Allocations*, which accompanies the legislation, clearly states the Government's view that allocation policies should provide for choice wherever possible.

4.3 The term 'Choice Based Lettings scheme' is used to mean that an authority has adopted allocation policies and procedures which include an advertising scheme.

4.4 CLG have set a target for all local authorities to have adopted a Choice Based Lettings system by 2010. CLG monitor progress towards the target using statistical information provided by local authorities on an annual basis (the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix or HSSA). An interim target of 25% of local authorities having adopted the system by 2005 has been met.

4.5 Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) are different from the traditional way of allocating housing via the waiting list. CBL allows applicants for social housing (and tenants who want to transfer) to apply for vacancies which are advertised widely in the neighbourhood (e.g. in the local newspaper or on a website).

4.6 Applicants can see the full range of available properties and can apply for any home to which they are matched (e.g. a single person would not be eligible for a 3-bedroom house). Priority is given to those with urgent needs, but where possible properties are allocated on the basis of who has been waiting the longest. Authorities provide feedback that helps applicants to assess their chances of success in subsequent applications

- 4.7 Whilst the Council's Housing Stock has been transferred to Green Vale Homes, the Council is still responsible for maintaining an allocations policy and a housing waiting list. To conform to this requirement we currently share our allocations policies and procedures with our stock transfer company Green Vale Homes.
- 4.8 It is generally felt that to develop an operational Choice Based Lettings scheme takes 18 – 24 months to achieve, therefore to hit the 2010 target a number of discussion have been held with neighbouring authorities as it would make sense for us to share resources and develop a single scheme for Pennine Lancashire.
- 4.9 To this end all Registered Social landlords with over 100 units of accommodation in the sub region have been contacted to seek their opinion. The views of this group are that a sub regional scheme would be the best and most economic way forward.
- 4.10 With this in mind, in 2007 the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy Officers Group put together a funding bid in response to additional resources made available by the CLG who were offering up to £100,000 to support the development of a sub regional Choice Based Lettings schemes.
- 4.11 The bid, led by the Strategy and Partnership Manager for Pendle, has been successful and funding of £100,000 has been received by Pendle Borough Council who are acting as the accountable body.
- 4.12 The Budget put together for this bid amounted to £250,00 with £100,000 from the CLG and the remainder being split between Local Authority partners and Registered Social Landlord Partners. A potential cost implication to the Borough of approx £20,000 is envisaged over two financial years 2008/09 and 2009/10 and resources to fund this contribution are being identified within the current budgets.
- 4.13 A large portion of the funding is for the procurement of an IT solution which again will be led by Pendle Borough Council, The Northern Housing Consortium has gone through a procurement exercise to support local authorities so that they do not need to individually go out to tender. This will save both time and money and would be the most value for money procurement method for the Scheme.
- 4.14 The funding will also be used to appoint a coordinator on a two year fixed term contract from April 2008 – March 2010 to manage the development and implementation of the scheme across Pennine Lancashire.
- 4.15 To formalise the arrangements across the partner local authorities, and reduce legal implications, a memorandum of understanding is in the process of being drawn up by Pendle Borough Council's Legal Team which will then need to be signed by all parties.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 The report states that £20k of resources are “being identified within the current budgets”.
- 5.2 The Head of Regeneration should ensure that this identification process is completed before resources are committed.
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6. MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1 This is an important report in the context of delivering quality services to customers.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

- 7.1 There are no HR implications.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Council is required by CLG to have introduced a Choice Based Lettings System by 2010. Working in partnership with other Pennine Lancashire local authorities and Registered Social Landlords there is the opportunity to introduce a system which will vastly improve services to the customer and bring about more choice and mobility within social housing.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 9.2 To note the progress on the development of a Pennine Lancashire Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- 9.3 That delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director of Regulatory Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration to sign a memorandum of understanding between the relevant parties.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 10.1 Cabinet Member for Regeneration

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- Is an Equality Impact Assessment required Yes
- Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached Yes

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required Yes

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached Yes

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No background papers