

MEETING OF THE CABINET 21ST SEPTEMBER 2005

Report of the Director of Adult, Housing and Community Services

CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

Purpose of Report

1. Seek the approval of Cabinet to develop and introduce a system of choice based lettings (CBL) in Dudley.

Background

2. To set the background reference is made to the March 2005 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister' (ODPM) document entitled 'Implementing and Developing Choice – Based Lettings – A guide to Key Issues'.
3. The Statutory Code of Guidance on the allocation of accommodation establishes the Government's belief that
 ".... allocation policies for social housing should provide choice wherever possible, while continuing to meet housing need..... this is the best way to ensure sustainable tenancies and to build settled and stable communities..."
4. Choice Based Lettings is seen as a letting system that will
 - a) Give people a greater say over where they live
 - b) Be more transparent and therefore more easily understood by everybody.
5. Government wants all local authorities to operate choice based lettings systems by 2010. Its targets, established in spring 2002, were
 - a) 25% of local authorities to have CBL systems by the end of 2005.
 - b) 100% of local authorities to have CBL systems by the end of 2010
6. To test the validity and workability of CBL, Government funded a number of pilot schemes. The pilots were conducted by a range of authorities each adopting different approaches. The evaluation of the pilots have enabled authorities to weigh up pros and cons and develop blueprints for the introduction of CBLs .

7. Officers in Dudley have used the Select Committee on the Environment as an initial sounding board. This Committee has received 3 reports / presentations to include evaluation of the pilots and possible options for introducing the approach in Dudley.
8. At the request of Members of the Select Committee on the Environment a visit was arranged with our neighbours Wolverhampton City Council. Members visited Bushbury Hill Estate Management Board. The visit allowed Members to question both officers and the Cabinet Member Councillor Peter Bilson fully on CBLs. The Chairman of the Committee concluded that the visit had been of value and that she and other members now had a better insight and understanding of the approach.

Finance

9. Dudley is only at the evaluation stage to determine what will work best for the customers of Dudley whilst at the same time meeting housing need and protecting vulnerable groups.
10. Financial provision has been made in the Housing Revenue Account to provide resources to undertake the evaluation, including the appointment of a Project Manager on a short term contract. The annual budgetary provision is £40,000.
11. No budgetary provision has yet been identified for the development and introduction of CBLs.

Law

12. Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 was amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 now provides that authorities must include a statement in their allocation scheme about their position on offering choice to applicants or the ability to express preferences; and includes a provision to facilitate the introduction of advertising schemes. The revised statutory Code of guidance on the allocation of accommodation states the Government's view that allocation policies should provide for choice wherever possible.
13. The legislation and statutory guidance provides a framework for Local authorities and their partners to develop schemes that reflect local requirements while at the same time meeting their statutory obligations.

Equality Impact

14. The introduction of CBLs will impact on all customers requiring rehousing by the Council. The pilots have demonstrated that CBLs increases understanding of allocations and offers a greater transparency. One key issue emerging from the pilots was the need to offer support to vulnerable groups. We will look to develop innovative approaches to ensure that any disadvantaged group is able to access the service provision.

Recommendations

15. Members note the contents of the report.

16. Cabinet approves the introduction of Choice Based Lettings.
17. Cabinet agrees that the Select Committee on the Environment should oversee that process and that a final proposal is brought back to the Cabinet in due course for its final approval prior to introduction.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Sanders". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'L'.

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Director of Adult, Housing and Community Service

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