
Select Committee on Environment – 29th January 2007

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Choice Based Lettings

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval to change the pilot area for Choice Based Lettings (CBLs) from Central Dudley to Stourbridge/Halesowen as per the recommendation of the CBLs Working Party.

Background

2. Cabinet (21st September 2005) approved the introduction of CBLs in Dudley and authorised this Committee to oversee the process and make recommendation to Cabinet on how CBLs will be introduced in Dudley.
3. The approach of this Committee was that it wanted to run a pilot and in accordance with officer recommendations, this was Central Dudley. Further it established a cross party Working Group to lead on CBLs (membership being Councillor Ms Craigie (Chairman), Councillors Mrs Cowell, Lowe and Mrs Turner).

Working Group CBLs

4. At its meeting on 17th January, members of the Working Group discussed an officer request to change the pilot area from Central Dudley to Halesowen and agree a revised timescale.
5. Since the making of the original decision, the Council has confirmed its intention to regenerate the North Priory. The potential impact of this is the displacement of some 264 households. Although individual families have not yet been interviewed as to their rehousing preferences, past experience indicates that there is less impact on areas furthest from the clearance area itself.
6. To ensure a proper evaluation of CBLs, the maximum number of properties need to be available for advertising. The rehousing of families from North Priory is likely to limit property availability in the Dudley area in particular.
7. Although members of the Working Party agreed that Central Dudley was no longer the appropriate pilot area it felt that Halesowen on its own would not provide sufficient information on which to evaluate a pilot. This was in terms of property type, the make-up of the waiting list to reflect vulnerable and hard to reach groups. It was felt this could be addressed by adding Stourbridge to the pilot in addition to Halesowen.

8. The CBL Working Group also agreed a revised timetable for their work programme – attached as Appendix 'A'.

Finance

9. Financial provision has been made in the Housing Revenue Account.

Law

10. 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.
11. 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.

Equity Impact

12. 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 of 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

13. The members of this Committee endorse the recommendation from the CBLs Working Group to change the pilot from Dudley to Stourbridge/Halesowen.
14. Members note the revised timetable as shown in appendix 'A'.



Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Contact Officer: Diane Channings
Telephone: 01384 815076
Email: Diane.Channings@dudley.co.uk

1. Due to initial impact of clearance from North Priory, delay the commencement of the CBLs to autumn 2007.
2. Run pilot at Halesowen/Stourbridge.
3. Revised timetable for CBLs Working Group:

10th April 2007 – receive report on Banding Options and impact on the Waiting List.

Pilot commences September 2007, Group to meet mid October 2007 and end December 2007 to receive updates and evaluation reports.

According to outcome at December 2007 meeting – continue with the Pilot and receive further reports or report findings to Select Committee on the Environment in January/February 2008 with recommendations to March 2008 Cabinet.
4. Select Committee on the Environment. Chairman's end of year report – it is intended to include an update on the work of the CBLs Working Group in this report.