



Sustainable Communities: Homes for All A Strategy for Choice Based Lettings

"... people want more choice in housing.

Instead of the old councils points system, we should be giving people choice to move to whatever form of housing they prefer – public housing, housing association, private renting or even part ownership.

We know that the choice-based letting systems work. They've been a huge success. So, today here's another commitment. Another radical change for housing in this country. Within five years a national system of choice in social housing covering all forms of rented accommodation."¹

Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott

Working towards a nationwide system of choice by 2010

Our strategy for choice-based lettings was outlined in *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*.²

We will maintain our existing target for *all* local authorities to operate choice-based lettings systems by 2010, and extend this target to include all social rented housing, shared ownership and low cost home ownership options.

We will encourage the extension of CBL schemes to cover the private rented sector, and make it as easy as possible for tenants to move between local authority, housing association and privately owned accommodation.

We want to see CBL schemes developing on a regional or sub-regional basis.

What is Choice-Based Lettings?

Choice-based lettings (CBL) schemes are a way of allocating social housing through giving tenants a greater say over where they live.

The schemes allow people to apply for advertised social housing vacancies – often in the local press or through an inter-active website. Applicants can see the full range of available properties and apply for any home to which they are matched. The successful applicant is the person with the highest priority for the property which they have bid for.

¹ Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott at the Labour Party Conference – September 2004.

² *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All – A Five Year Plan* from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – published in January 2005.

Why is CBL a good thing?

Giving people a choice and a stake in where they live will lead to:

- **More satisfied tenants, who stay longer, pay the rent and look after their homes.**

This in turn will ensure more stable, viable and inclusive communities.

Tenants welcome CBL as a more open and transparent system which offers greater control and choice.

“You feel more that you are in charge. And you can find a place that you think is better for you, rather than have them think you can go here and it might not be suitable.”³

And there’s no doubting the enthusiasm of landlords who have adopted CBL. CBL schemes have generated renewed interest in social housing and in many cases improved housing management performance. The end result is a marked improvement in the relationship between tenant and landlord.

“We save money because it is less labour-intensive. There is an initial set-up cost because of the technology, but in the longer run it is definitely more efficient. We have been able to reduce the number of staff administering the scheme and divert those resources into other areas, for example tackling anti-social behaviour, which has become an emerging priority for our tenants.”⁴

Partnership working and the regional agenda

Partnerships between local authorities and registered social landlords, working together with private landlords wherever possible, are the best way to ensure the greatest choice and flexibility in meeting tenants’ housing needs.

These arrangements – operating on a regional or sub-regional basis – can:

- Enable mobility.
- Break down artificial boundaries and recognise existing housing and labour markets.
- Reduce costs by enabling partners to share costs and for larger RSLs to cut the costs of being involved in a several different schemes.
- Bring together a larger pool of available housing, giving tenants more choice and helping to ease localised problems of high demand.

³ *Applicant’s Perspectives on Choice-Based Lettings*, BMRB, 2004.

⁴ Chris Wood, Director of Housing, Newham Council: Oral evidence to the PASC enquiry on *Choice, Voice and Public Services*, 25 November 2004.

Offering more options and support for those looking for a new home

We want councils to adopt a 'housing options' approach alongside their CBL scheme through:

- Promoting a wider range of housing options – shared ownership, low cost owner occupation, the private rented sector, mutual exchange.
- Making more and better information available about other housing services such as care and repair, staying put initiatives and adaptation services.
- Offering one-stop shops, advice centres.
- Increasing mobility, particularly marketing properties and neighbourhoods in low demand areas.

The Choice Based Lettings vision for 2010

This will include:

- Widening the choice social landlords are able to offer to all their tenants, especially supporting the most vulnerable in society to choose where they live, by offering access to a wider range of homes.
- Ensuring local authorities and housing associations work in partnership. It makes more sense for councils and housing associations to work together than to set up competing CBL schemes.
- Including privately rented homes in the CBL schemes.
- Offering everyone, who is considering shared ownership and other low cost home ownership options, equal choice.
- A regional or sub-regional approach of landlords joining together over a geographical area to share resources and offer choice.

To deliver our strategy we will:

- Provide funding to support the creation of sub-regional and regional choice-based lettings schemes.
- £4m will be available over three years – 2005/6–2007/8.
- Work in partnership with the Housing Corporation to encourage local authorities and housing associations to work together to deliver choice to their tenants.

- Work with housing providers, landlord associations and other stakeholders, including the voluntary sector, to ensure CBL systems meet the needs of vulnerable tenants and the BME community.
- Develop good practice for landlords, through guidance, and national and regional events.
- Produce statutory guidance to assist authorities in introducing CBL.
- Appoint a national CBL adviser to work with social landlords on how best to set up new, and develop existing, CBL schemes.
- Continue to look at the longer term impacts of CBL on issues such as tenancy sustainment and community cohesion through research, including studying the views of applicants and tenants.
- Complete a Race Impact Assessment of the choice-based lettings policy and the allocation legislation.
- Improve nomination arrangements between local authorities and RSLs by promoting common housing registers.
- Ensure developments in other policy areas take account of the CBL agenda, particularly the homelessness prevention agenda, and improving access to the private rented sector and low cost home ownership options.

Further Information

Further information on Choice-Based Lettings is available on the ODPM website:

www.odpm.gov.uk/choicebased-lettings

Further copies of this leaflet are available on the website at the address above or from:

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