

REPORT TO CABINET

REPORT OF: Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance and Housing

REPORT NO: CHSC018

DATE: 1st June 2009

TITLE:	Choice based lettings (CBL)	
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	Key Decision	
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Cllr Paul Carpenter, Portfolio Holder for Organisational Development and Housing	
CONTACT OFFICER:	Teena Twelves, Corporate Head Sustainable Communities Tony Campbell, Director of Tenancy Services	
INITIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT:	Carried out and Referred to in paragraph (7) below:	Full impact assessment Required:
Equality and Diversity	Not at this stage	Not at this stage
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT:	Report will be published on the Council's website	
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Cabinet report on Allocations policy January 2008	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report recommends that Cabinet:

- Notes the progress to date
- May wish to suggest that one option is more preferable than others
- Request that officers bring a further report giving more detailed information to the next meeting

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT/DECISION REQUIRED

Government expect all local authorities to adopt a choice based lettings (CBL) approach to housing allocations from 2010 and in publishing statutory guidance on CBL is encouraging local housing authorities to consider possible joined up approaches on a sub-regional basis. A summary of the statutory guidance is attached for members' information. (Appendix 1).

This presents South Kesteven with a number of options which officers have been exploring. These include possible schemes with Lincolnshire and with Peterborough. The report seeks the views of Cabinet on CBL options.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT (SUMMARY – USE APPENDICES FOR DETAILED INFORMATION)

Background:

In 2006 the Lincolnshire Districts (excluding SKDC) commenced work on a sub regional CBL approach. More recently this work has seen the development of two schemes one for East Lindsey and Boston (called the East Lincs CBL) and the other for City of Lincoln, West Lindsey and North Kesteven (known as the Central Cluster). South Holland although originally the lead authority for the Lincolnshire wide project, have not stated their preferred CBL route at the present time. Because the Lincolnshire wide project was supported with £100k of Government money there is still a desire to make sure the two schemes can operate together hence the existence of a Lincolnshire Project Board to deliver the two schemes as agreed by Lincolnshire Chief Executives.

The East Lincs and the Central Cluster partnerships reflect the Coastal and Central housing market areas (HMAs) as defined for Lincolnshire by Regional Government; South Kesteven are within the Peterborough Partial HMA along with Peterborough City, Rutland and South Holland councils. Because of this natural synergy and that Peterborough has had a successful CBL system in place for a number of years this is being explored as a potential option.

CBL aspires to create a more customer focussed and transparent approach to housing allocations as customers are able to make decisions about their housing future; for SKDC it also provides the opportunity to integrate its housing register (waiting list) function with its statutory housing advice/homeless service. As part of preparing for a CBL approach Cabinet approved a new draft housing allocations policy in January 2008. As yet this has not been consulted on (as required by law) with a range of stakeholders because it was anticipated that if SKDC was to join with a sub regional scheme it would need to either adopt a common allocation policy in conjunction with other partners or in the case of the Peterborough CBL scheme adopt their approved policy.

Current Position:

East Lincs CBL

Boston have had CBL in place since January 2007 thus East Lindsey and the other Registered Social Landlords within the East Lincs scheme have been able to adopt a common allocation policy, banding scheme, produce guidelines, processes and procedures plus a single application form relatively quickly. It is not proposed that SKDC would consider joining the coastal group directly.

Central Cluster

In this arrangement City of Lincoln Council has had CBL in place for a number of years; thus they only really need to update the IT technology that provides the interface with their customers. In looking to join with North Kesteven and West Lindsey the three partners need to agree a common allocations policy, banding and approach. There is a desire to have a scheme in place by April 2010. As each of the partners has a different housing management IT system quotes are being

sought for the provision of an appropriate web based system on which to advertise available properties and receive bids from customers for the properties. Indicative one-off costings for software systems for all 7 districts range from £88k to £138k.

Peterborough Homes CBL

In the last few weeks officers have visited Peterborough City Council to look at their approach and the possible options.

Peterborough has a CBL scheme in place with 10 other major RSL partners and used by a number of private landlords. As you might expect for a large diverse city authority it is probably the best developed CBL approach viewed, capable of providing SKDC with a range of service and delivery options.

Peterborough have suggested a number of service options for both ourselves and South Holland to consider. The early costings range from £110k to £228k for both authorities depending on the level of service to be provided. These will need further investigation and evaluation.

SKDC

Officers have continued to contribute to the Lincolnshire Central Cluster scheme policies. Work to review our current housing register has commenced recently. Further enquiries are being made as regards the cost of the software required for a stand alone solution.

4. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There still remains an option to implement our own scheme for which Council has already provided one-off funding of £150,000 in our 2009/10 budget. One of the difficulties in considering options is that we have limited actual financial information available to us at this stage.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

All options would result in a need to review staffing arrangements for allocations and front line housing advice in due course.

6. RISK AND MITIGATION (INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY AND DATA QUALITY)

There could be a risk associated with the future of the Lincolnshire project because it had previously received CLG funding. However if we were to work with Peterborough it is not a wholesale rejection of the Lincolnshire project, more a belief that that working within Housing Market Areas is more beneficial to our residents. A full risk assessment will be carried out once preferred options are agreed.

7. ISSUES ARISING FROM EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

None at this stage. Once a preferred option is agreed the appropriate assessment will be undertaken.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

None at this stage.

9. COMMENTS OF SECTION 151 OFFICER

The 2009/10 budgets includes a one-off financial sum of £100k in respect of revenue (General Fund) and £50k capital (HRA). These were agreed by Council for the introduction of CBL. Thereafter the management and operation of the service will need to be met from existing resources.

10. COMMENTS OF MONITORING OFFICER

The decision of choice of provision for choice based lettings should not be made on the information available to members to date. The report is for update and noted only. The decision of this report is not key, however the ultimate decision on choice of provision will be a key decision.

11. APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 Executive summary of Government code of guidance on CBL