

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Tuesday 11 September 2012 at 2.00 pm

**To be held at the Town Hall, Pinstone
Street, Sheffield, S1 2HH**

The Press and Public are Welcome to Attend

Membership

Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), David Barker, Nikki Bond, Simon Clement-Jones, Sheila Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Anders Hanson, Martin Lawton, Shaffaq Mohammed, Peter Rippon and Chris Rosling-Josephs.

Substitute Members

In accordance with the Constitution, Substitute Members may be provided for the above Committee Members as and when required.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE MEETING

The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee exercises an overview and scrutiny function in respect of the planning, development and monitoring of performance and delivery of services which aim to make Sheffield a safer, stronger and more sustainable city for all of its residents.

A copy of the agenda and reports is available on the Council's website at www.sheffield.gov.uk. You can also see the reports to be discussed at the meeting if you call at the First Point Reception, Town Hall, Pinstone Street entrance. The Reception is open between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, Monday to Thursday and between 9.00 am and 4.45 pm. on Friday, or you can ring on telephone no. 2734552. You may not be allowed to see some reports because they contain confidential information. These items are usually marked * on the agenda.

Members of the public have the right to ask questions or submit petitions to Scrutiny Committee meetings. Please see the website or contact Democratic Services for further information.

Scrutiny Committee meetings are normally open to the public but sometimes the Committee may have to discuss an item in private. If this happens, you will be asked to leave. Any private items are normally left until last. If you would like to attend the meeting please report to the First Point Reception desk where you will be directed to the meeting room.

If you require any further information about this Scrutiny Committee, please contact David Molloy, Scrutiny Policy Officer on 0114 2735065 or email david.molloy@sheffield.gov.uk.

FACILITIES

There are public toilets available, with wheelchair access, on the ground floor of the Town Hall. Induction loop facilities are available in meeting rooms.

Access for people with mobility difficulties can be obtained through the ramp on the side to the main Town Hall entrance.

**SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY AND POLICY
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AGENDA
11 SEPTEMBER 2012**

Order of Business

- 1. Welcome and Housekeeping Arrangements**
- 2. Apologies for Absence**
- 3. Exclusion of Public and Press**
To identify items where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public
- 4. Declarations of Interest**
Members to declare any interests they have in the business to be considered at the meeting
- 5. Minutes of Previous Meeting**
To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th July, 2012
- 6. Public Questions and Petitions**
To receive any questions or petitions from members of the public
- 7. Lettings Policy Review**
To receive a report on options for the Lettings Policy Review
- 8. Anti-Social Behaviour Review**
To receive a presentation on the Anti-Social Behaviour Review.
- 9. Police and Crime Commissioner/Police and Crime Panel**
Report of the Executive Director, Communities on an update of the Police and Crime Commissioner/Police and Crime Panel.
- 10. Policy Update**
Report of the Scrutiny Policy Officer.
- 11. Date of Next Meeting**
To note that the next meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee will be held on Thursday, 8th November, 2012, at 2.00 pm in the Town Hall.

ADVICE TO MEMBERS ON DECLARING INTERESTS AT MEETINGS

A new Standards regime was introduced on 1st July, 2012 by the Localism Act 2011. The new regime made changes to the way that your interests needed to be registered and declared. Prejudicial and personal interests no longer exist and they have been replaced by Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs).

The Act also required that provision is made for interests which are not Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and required the Council to introduce a new local Code of Conduct for Members. Provision has been made in the new Code for dealing with “personal” interests.

Guidance on declarations of interest, incorporating regulations published by the Government in relation to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, has been circulated to you previously, and has been published on the Council’s website as a downloadable document at -<http://councillors.sheffield.gov.uk/councillors/register-of-councillors-interests>

If at all possible, you should try to identify any potential interest you may have before the meeting so that you and the person you ask for advice can fully consider all the circumstances before reaching a conclusion on what action you should take.

Further advice can be obtained from Lynne Bird, Director of Legal Services on 0114 2734018 or email lynne.bird@sheffield.gov.uk

Interim Findings And Recommendations Allocations Policy Review - 11th September 2012

1. Purpose of report

To set out interim findings and recommendations, in order to gain a steer from the Member Task Group on what options to consider developing in detail to include in a new draft Lettings Policy.

2. Introduction and background

The Allocations Policy Review Project Board and Project Team have worked with the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish group over the past 6 months. Comprehensive consultation has been carried out between September 2011 and February 2012. Following the completion of the consultation, analysis has been undertaken and a report produced setting out interim findings.

Members have already given recommendations on a number of the key areas identified in that report including Registration, Banding, Age Designation and Bedroom Eligibility Criteria. This report includes further areas that officers would like an indication from Members with regard to whether they should be worked up in to detail Policy recommendations for inclusion in a revised Lettings Policy.

For each key area of Policy identified above this report gives information on:

- What the current Policy is.
- What works well in the current Policy.
- What the issues are with the current Policy.
- What the consultation showed.
- What research and bench marking told us.
- Options for consideration with main advantages and disadvantages.
- Interim recommended option to develop in detail and initial business case for this.

Members are asked to give a steer on the initial recommendations so that officers can develop detailed proposals. Members are also asked to indicate if there are any alternative approaches they would wish to be developed in to Policy options. Detailed proposals will include a full appraisal of financial implications, risks and impacts including Equality Impacts.

It should be acknowledged that in revising the Lettings Policy this will not resolve all of the issues that arise and may have a contributory part to play only for example in the management of anti-social behaviour. It should also be noted that for some issues there simply isn't a total solution available. For example whilst we should try to make the best match of a property to customer needs we have constraints imposed by the type of stock we have or where it is located. The option of Council Housing will in these circumstances provide a housing option but will not necessarily be able to fulfil either all of an applicant's needs or aspirations. Many of our tenants are likely to continue to need on going support beyond the initial letting.

3. Summary of interim recommendations

This report contains options to consider for 3 key areas. The report sets out 2/3 main options for consideration. To help Members to consider these, officers have indicated a recommended option at this stage, which it is felt would most merit being developed in to a full Policy option. The recommended options are listed below:

1. **Choice Based Lettings** – retain CBL as the advertising and matching mechanism for properties as it is more efficient and transparent than officer allocation and popular with customers to be able to express preference for individual properties.
2. **Bids** - extend the restriction to apply to all applicants, therefore restricting all applicants to 3 bids per cycle. Retain the facility for staff to place additional bids, where necessary, for priority applicants in order to fulfil Council's duty to applicants with urgent housing needs.
3. **Adaptations** - build into Policy the flexibility to take highly adapted properties out of CBL and match manually.

It should be stressed that there are many different approaches that could be taken and that the ideas and options presented in the report are not all mutually exclusive of each other so elements from some could be incorporated with features of others. It is also of course the case that Members may not favour any of the options presented and officers would welcome an indication of any alternative ideas that Members would like to be developed in to detailed Policy options.

4. Key drivers and context for change

The key drivers for change that the Lettings Policy Review must address are:

- Perceptions around fairness, transparency and consistency.
- Simplicity and ease of use for customers.
- Make the best use of available stock and effective management of a scarce resource.
- Managing expectations when we have less stock and more demand than when the current Policy was adopted when we had surplus stock and encouraged applications from both people who wanted housing in the near future and as an “insurance Policy” in case a future housing need arose.
- Ensuring equalities are promoted in everything we do and that none of our practices are discriminatory.
- Legal compliance and a cohesive Policy ensuring all the complex elements work together to contribute to achieve our aims and priorities for the city.
- Ensure sufficient priority is given to reasonable preference groups and any local priorities.
- Support aspirations and encourage attainment and financial inclusion.
- Contribute to a robust Self Financing model – delivering value for money and be cost effective.
- Respond to welfare reforms that will affect demand, customer's ability to pay for accommodation and impact on rent arrears.
- Respond to the Localism Act.
- Support tenancy sustainability.
- Support community cohesion and promote mixed and sustainable communities.

5. Choice Based Letting

Current Policy

The current Policy is for the majority of properties to be let by Choice Based Lettings - i.e. by customers bidding for properties and being matched by the criteria set out in the Policy.

The majority of properties are advertised and customers have a week in which to bid for properties. Customers are then matched – according to length of priority/waiting time. Successful customers are informed of the outcome and offered a property. At this point checks are made on identity and eligibility.

Any property that has not been allocated via this system is let via First Come First Served.

A number of properties are allocated as management lets i.e. are allocated to customers with a requirement for that property e.g. to discharge a duty or deal with an urgent/unusual circumstance.

What works well with CBL?

- CBL enables available properties for let to be advertised. This makes lets more open, transparent and accessible to all. Letting information can be published in respect of each let.
- Following the introduction of CBL there are fewer low demand properties. In the past shortlists for particular areas excluded applicants that hadn't identified that area as of interest to them.
- CBL is customer led and not officer led. Customers like being able to see and choose.
- Reduces costs in terms of voids, hard to let properties, officer time in managing shortlists.
- On satisfaction surveys undertaken, customers have given an average rating of 8.3 (out of 10) for 'how easy is it to understand the bidding process' and 9.0 for 'ease of bidding via the website'.

Issues with the current Policy

- CBL can be confused with the Policy itself and be blamed for lots of things that it doesn't influence such as the availability of stock/increased demand.
- The word 'choice' can be felt to be misleading as there is little choice of properties.
- Some vulnerable customers may find it hard to access the system or be pro-active in engaging in their search for housing.
- There is some tension with the concept of choice and urgent priority cases/assisted bids.
- SCC was an earlier adopter of CBL and is benefiting from reviewing how other Councils have developed their approaches
- The current ICT system was the best available at the time CBL was introduced but is now out of date and needs to be improved to manage the system efficiently and provide better information.

Consultation Results

- 83% of people said it was easy or very easy to register.
- 78% said it was easy or very easy to bid.

- 75% liked the current system of being able to see all the available properties and register bids.
- Customers do not want to be allocated properties they have not expressed an interest in.
- 40% said they had ideas about how the CBL system could be improved. Most of these suggestions for improvement could potentially be addressed in the new ICT system currently being purchased.

Relevant Research

The large majority of local authorities use CBL to advertise and let their properties and are pleased with the way CBL operates. Many authorities have found that they no longer have a problem with low demand but this is also due to decreased stock being available. Most report voids times have been improved by enabling shortlists of customers that actually do want to live in a particular property. The majority of Councils maintain an up-to-date register that is regularly reviewed so they are confident bidders are eligible for housing and for the property they are bidding for.

Some authorities have moved away from CBL such as Barnet, Portsmouth and Stoke. Barnet and Portsmouth have changed their policies to be far more restrictive and Barnet have reduced their housing register from around 21,000 households to approximately 750 through this process. However, it should be noted that Councils who have done this are in the minority and have far fewer properties available than Sheffield overall and as a percentage of the housing stock in their area.

Option 1 - Keep CBL as the advertising and matching mechanism using the new ICT to manage more effectively

Advantages

- An open transparent system.
- Empowers customers to manage their own housing solutions.
- Less staff needed to administer this system and very little officer discretion.
- Fewer complaints and Members' enquiries, better customer satisfaction.
- Fewer hard to let properties, less rent loss and fewer voids periods.
- New ICT system will produce cost savings and efficiencies as processes will be speeded up, the ability to tailor adverts to the specific customer etc, easier to keep the register up to date.
- Minimal change risks as we already have CBL established in Sheffield.

Disadvantages

- Customers have unrealistic expectations of choice raised.
- System of allocation is confused with other aspects of Policy.

Option 2 – Officer Allocations of Each Property

Key Features

- Revert to system where people register interest for areas.
- Officers allocate properties as they fall vacant to customers according to agreed criteria e.g. points based on waiting time/priority etc.
- Properties are not advertised but a register is maintained and people matched "in turn" for each vacancy.

Advantages

- Do not have to maintain process and mechanism for advertising properties.
- Do not raise expectations of choice and it is clear why a property has been allocated to next applicant that fits criteria.
- Easy for customers to understand reaching top of a list but would need to have policies in relations to refusals as could not have inactive people on register.

Disadvantages

- Disempowering to customers - dissatisfaction at returning to officer allocation.
- More staff required to deliver the service.
- More MP and Member enquiries, complaints and queries when it is felt property doesn't meet need.
- Less transparent and open and more officer discretion.
- More hard to let properties as people will be offered they are not interested in - would need to consider penalties for refusals.
- Increase in voids and re-let times, some properties will be empty for a lot longer.

Officer Recommendation

Option 1: Keep CBL as the advertising and matching mechanism using the new ICT to manage more effectively

Business case for recommendation

- Self Financing Business Plan identifies that the new CBL system will lead to efficiencies that include the ability to restrict bidding and other IT functionality the current system doesn't have.
- CBL is popular with customers and this is born out by the consultation results and by customer satisfaction surveys undertaken by Sheffield Homes.

6. Bidding

Current Policy

Key Features

- Vacant properties are advertised openly.
- Anyone who is registered can bid for an advertised property.
- Properties are advertised on a weekly cycle.
- There is no restriction on the amounts of bids an applicant can place per cycle.

What works well in the current bidding part of the Policy?

- The system is accessible and easy to use.
- Vulnerable applicants have assistance with their bidding.

Issues with the current Policy

- The current Lettings Policy was introduced at a time of low demand in many estates and because of this it allowed unlimited bids from applicants. This was to encourage applicants to consider a wide range of choices. This is no longer a tenable Policy as demand for Social Housing has far outstripped supply.
- Some applicants appear to be bidding without real consideration of whether they want to live in the property they are bidding for.
- Bids are unlimited (on average 24 bids per applicant are placed each week) and this has led to a high level of refusals.
- One applicant has successfully bid, been offered and refused in excess of 50 properties. This has led to waste of staff time and resources, prevented other applicants in need of housing being housed expediently, led to increased void times and rent loss.
- Bids could not be restricted within the current Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system due to the inability of the IT to facilitate this.

Consultation Results

- Tenant support for restricting bids was evidenced in the budget consultation exercise in 2009.
- The recent Allocations Policy Review consultation questionnaire stated the intention to restrict applicants to three bids per weekly cycle and asked whether further restrictions are needed. 65% said there should be no further restrictions. Of those who said that there should be further restrictions, some said that we should also restrict frequent refusals. A number of housing staff think that refusals should be limited, as did some tenant groups, public sector workers, RPs, a multi agency group, and an older people's group.
- Housing staff feel that restricting bids for waiting time applicants will be positive as it will help to reduce the refusal rate.
- RPs generally think bids should be restricted.
- Some interest groups (BME and older people) think that three bids is enough.
- Some think bids could be restricted to priority applicants too; others did not - a multi agency group was concerned it would take longer to re-house people if bids were restricted to priority groups.

Additional Information

- Cabinet looked at the issues raised above and in January 2010 took the following decision:

'(e) the Council's Lettings Policy be amended so that, from implementation of the new Choice-Based Lettings website, applicants other than those awarded immediate, urgent or planned priority re-housing be limited to three choice-based lettings bids per week and further analysis be carried out to assess the feasibility of extending this restriction to all applicants;

(f) the Interim Director of Housing and Regeneration, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable, Safer Communities be granted delegated authority to determine the wording of the amendment to the Lettings Policy and the date of its implementation.'
- It was acknowledged that it would not be technically possible to implement this change prior to going live with a new CBL system.
- The Council commissioned Sheffield Homes to implement a new CBL system in 2011. The

new system will introduce a number of key features, which will positively affect the issue of the number of bids, including the capacity to display real time bid positions (see below).

- The new system will be interactive so bidders will be able to see what position they are on the list and also withdraw or move bids during the bidding cycle in order to be able to ensure they are well placed to obtain an offer. Using the current system bidders have no idea where they are likely to be successful when placing a bid, so as a result of this they may place large numbers of bids, including for properties that do not necessarily suit their requirements.
- One key area is to ensure restricting bids does not delay re-housing of priority cases. Other authorities manage priority cases by restricting bids and find this encourages people to be more focussed in their bidding. This will be helped by the greater transparency under the new system. In addition there will be the facility for additional bids to be placed by staff where necessary in exceptional cases.

Relevant Research

- Benchmarking with 16 other Local Authorities showed 13 out of the 16 authorities restrict bids to all applicants to 3 per cycle. The 3 authorities that have unlimited bids do have penalties for refusals, which is another way in which excessive bidding can be managed.
- All the authorities scrutinised have levels of priority identified within a banding system.
- 9 of the authorities advertise everything to priority first.
- 9 of the authorities do not place enforced bids.

Options

1. Keep the system as it currently is and reverse the previous Cabinet decision, therefore keeping unlimited bids for all applicants.
2. Implement the formerly agreed Policy change to restrict the bids of Waiting Time applicants only.
3. Extend the restriction to apply to all applicants, therefore restricting all applicants to 3 bids per cycle. Retain the facility for staff to place additional bids, where necessary, for priority applicants in order to fulfil Council's duty to applicants with urgent housing needs.

Option 1 – Keep the system as it currently is and reverse the previous Cabinet decision, therefore keeping unlimited bids for all applicants

Advantages

- Staff, support agencies and applicants are familiar with this system and arrangement.
- There will be no danger of priority applicants being restricted in their bidding.

Disadvantages

- Raises customer expectations and creates the impression that all properties are obtainable which is unrealistic.
- Results in higher number of customer complaints and frustration with CBL system and current Policy.
- Encourages unrealistic bidding choices/patterns.
- Does not assist applicants with making informed choices.
- Makes matching more difficult because of the large numbers of bids in the system.
- Limits our ability to further reduce vacant turnaround time and therefore rent loss.
- Wastes staff time and resources in administering a bid intensive system and multiple

refusals.

Option 2 - Implement the agreed Policy change to restrict the bids of Waiting Time applicants only.

Key Features

- Waiting Time applicants will only be able to place 3 bids per cycle.
- Priority applicants will have unlimited bids per cycle.

Advantages

- Priority applicants will be able to maximise opportunities for bidding.

Disadvantages

- Keeping unrestricted bids for priority applicants may well be perceived as unfair and could lead to applicants 'priority chasing' in order to be able to place more bids.
- Priority applicants will not be empowered to focus their bids constructively and therefore still be applying a 'scatter gun' approach, often bidding for properties they are not interested and refuse when offered.
- Around 80% of properties are advertised to applicants with priority, so not extending the rule to these applicants would not yield the predicted financial benefits

Option 3 - Extend the restriction to apply to all applicants therefore restricting all applicants to 3 bids per cycle. Retain the facility for staff to place additional bids, where necessary, for priority applicants in order to fulfil Council's duty to applicants with urgent housing needs.

Key Features

- All applicants will be restricted to 3 bids per cycle.
- Staff will be able to place additional back office bids for priority applicants, if perceived to be necessary.

Advantages

- All applicants will be able to make the same amount of bids.
- A simpler system for applicants to understand.
- The system will be easier for staff to administrate.
- The system will be perceived as fairer.
- All applicants will be able to focus their bidding.
- This system does not encourage 'priority chasing'.
- This will help focus bidding and is hoped will result in less refusals.
- Cost savings can be realised.
- Applicants will be housed quicker because there will be less wasted bids and resulting refusals.
- Applicants will only be able to see and bid on properties they are eligible for thus not wasting bids.
- Applicants will be able to see where their bid is ranking and have the ability to remove bids and place them on other properties where they are ranking higher on the short list.
- Enhanced applicant satisfaction levels and reduction in complaints.

Disadvantages

- Choice will be restricted more.

Officer Recommendation

Option 3: Extend the restriction to apply to all applicants, therefore restricting all applicants to 3 bids per cycle. Retain the facility for staff to place additional bids, where necessary, for priority applicants in order to fulfil Council's duty to applicants with urgent housing needs.

Business Case For Recommendation

- High usage of the system by customers – an applicant places an average number of 24 bids per cycle, making the system more complex and which leads to higher administration needed by staff.
- Refusal rates are exceptionally high compared to other local authorities:
 - Acceptance on first offers is 38% in comparison with the top local authority quartile operating at 52%.
- A high proportion of bids are placed for properties that applicants do not actually want:
 - 26% of offers are not responded to by applicants.
 - 20% of applicants who are made offers state they have made poor bids.This leads to wasted staff time – in terms of placing bids, matching, undertaking tenancy checks, making (abortive) offers, accompanied viewings, dealing with enquiries/customer dissatisfaction.
- High rent loss – impacted upon by higher ratio of offers per property:
 - Our rent loss in Sheffield due to a higher rate of refusals is 2.18% against a national upper quartile figure of 1.32% (Housemark definition and performance indicator).
- 22% of bids are ineligible (for size or type of property) and not all properties are allocated as advertised – 15% of the properties advertised to priorities actually go on to be allocated to Waiting Time applicants.
- Vacant rent loss could be reduced if bids were restricted across the board by improving relet times (estimated £200,000 per year). If the changes to bidding were restricted to waiting time applicants only, this would equate to a saving of £27,000 to £100,000 per year. Further work on quantifying these savings is currently being undertaken.
- Further savings may be achieved on temporary accommodation costs through homeless applicants being re-housed
- There is also potentially a reduction in the staff time required to manage refusals or no reply to offers. The initial business case for the CBL project specified a saving of 5 full time employees, equating to £125,000, but further analysis has indicated a potential saving of £187,000 per year.

7. Adaptations

Current Policy

Key Features

Section D 3d: People with mobility priority will be considered first for some ground floor flats, bungalows and adapted houses.

Section H 4: Applicants in urgent and immediate need of housing - A priority will only be given for a property that will resolve the applicant's housing need within the necessary timescale. This may not always meet all the applicant's aspirations. For example an applicant with mobility needs for level accommodation will not be given priority to move from a house with stairs to another house.

Section I 12: Moves that release a high demand property for letting

Section I 12.3: Priority will be given where:

Section I 12.3d: Their current home has not been adapted for a person with a physical disability and they are in a property that is classed as high demand (3 or more bedrooms or a bungalow with 2 or more bedrooms).

Section I 13.1: Or to a household living in a council property built or adapted especially for a person with a disability and that person no longer lives there or no longer needs it.

An applicant has succeeded to the tenancy of a property built or adapted specially for a person with special needs and they do not need that property.

Section I 15.3e: They are Service Personnel who need to move to suitably adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability, which they have sustained as a result of service in the Armed Forces.

Section I 15.7: Mobility priority will be given for 13 weeks. The priority will be reviewed at the end of 13 weeks if the applicant has not been re-housed. In some instances the applicant may have specific needs for a specialist property (for example, a 3 bedroom disabled persons property or adapted house) that has not become available during the last 13 weeks. In these instances, the priority will be extended. Otherwise, the priority may be cancelled.

Section K 1.5: If someone succeeds to a property built or adapted for a person with special needs and they do not need that property, they will be given priority for a move.

Section M 2f: A mutual exchange will be refused if the property has been adapted for a person with a physical disability and is very different from an ordinary property, and if the exchange were to go ahead, a disabled person would no longer live in the property.

What works well in the current adaptations part of the Policy?

- The fact that disabled people can participate in the Choice Based Lettings system and express preferences for available properties.
- People with mobility priority will be considered first for some ground floor flats, bungalows and adapted houses.
- Priority for moving is given to people in an adapted home that don't need it.
- Priority is given to people who are in a home that is not adapted and they want to move to a property that is adapted.

Issues with the current Policy

- Adapted properties sometimes get let to people who are not disabled, this often means the adaptations are removed.
- Our current Lettings Policy doesn't identify levels of need; all priorities are in the same band. This means that someone might need a particular property with its adaptations or location urgently but the property will go to someone else because they have had their priority for longer.
- There are issues around matching highly adapted properties with an applicant that really needs all those adaptations.
- Officers are under pressure to adapt unsuitable properties.
- There is a lack of accurate information about adaptations in our stock and some adaptations are old or in an unsuitable property.
- Better definitions are required to distinguish between accessible, adapted and purpose built or highly adapted properties.
- There is a need for a joined up register with RPs and the Accessible Property Register.
- There are often problems letting adapted properties.
- The housing register could be managed to improve targeting and marketing opportunities.
- Ground floor properties need to be prioritised for people and families with mobility needs and not age banded. Age is not an indicator of disability.

Consultation Results

- In general disabled people find it more difficult to access the system e.g., registering and bidding.
- Some feel that adapted properties should be reserved for disabled people and that only disabled people should be able to bid on them. Others feel that there should be a separate list or that properties need to be set aside for a period of time before being available to general needs.
- It was suggested that we should minimise adaptations to non appropriate properties; this would require accurate knowledge of the stock and a possible amendment to the tenancy agreement to say that we won't un-adapt or adapt an unsuitable property.
- Priority should be given to people awaiting costly adaptations who should be re-housed as an alternative to doing those adaptations. This requires a cultural change in the approach of support agencies and tenants' families as often there is an expectation that family homes will be adapted for single older residents rather than being encouraged to move somewhere more suitable. Assess so entire need is met first time round.
- The Policy should clearly define criteria that will qualify for mobility priority and the evidence that will support qualification. Criteria should be listed in plain English, as should supporting evidence, and be widely publicised.
- More time to decide is needed once an offer has been made.

What the Adaptations Officer Subgroup recommended

- That we should separate out highly adapted properties
- That we should introduce levels of need to enable a focus on urgent need
- Advertise adapted/adaptable properties to mobility priority first/separately
- Review time limits to be realistic
- Formalise definitions to enable clarity for customers and advertising of properties

- Take area of support into account for all applicants
- Allow 2 or 3 offers before removing priority

Suggested definitions

Definitions

- Highly adapted – more than one adaptation and could meet the needs of most disabled people (wheelchair users).
- Adapted – properties with some adaptations - will not necessarily meet the needs of most wheelchair users.
- Adaptable - could be adapted to meet the needs of most wheelchair users.

Relevant Research

- Nine highly adapted properties became available in 2010-11 – five bungalows and four houses. None of these were four bed properties.
- Approximately 19 properties with a variety of adaptations become available each year and 1-2 bed ground floor or level access flats and maisonettes are much more readily available although not necessarily in the area the applicant would like.
- Currently 23 applicants are awaiting adapted properties. The adaptations needed include stair lifts, wet rooms, widened doorways and through-floor lifts. 3 of these are waiting for highly adapted properties, 12 for properties with three or more bedrooms.
- 87 people have been on the mobility priority for over 6 months.
- Most authorities confirm that this is a challenging and complex area of allocations.
- There is a split between authorities operating these lets through CBL and those taking them out of CBL.
- Most authorities using the newer more popular CBL system delivery modes, such as Abritas, Locator and Orchard, do operate these allocations through CBL. This appears to be largely due to the enhanced functionality that these types of system can offer in terms of identification and marketing of accessible properties. But the system will only be as good as the information contained within it.
- Most authorities do build the flexibility into their policies to match highly adapted properties outside CBL.
- Best practice would be to deliver a choice based lettings service that provides high quality information on property accessibility so that disabled people could make informed housing choices and actively participate in choice based lettings.

Options

1. Keep the system as it currently is noting that the acquisition of a new CBL system is going to provide enhanced functionality.
2. Retain and develop the adapted features already in the Policy, building in the additional flexibility to take highly adapted properties out of CBL and match manually.
3. Take all adapted properties out of CBL.

Option 1 - Keep the system as it currently is noting that the acquisition of a new CBL system is going to provide enhanced functionality

Advantages

- Members and Staff are familiar with the current Policy.
- Customers are familiar with current Policy.
- The current system will probably improve with the implementation of the new CBL system.

Disadvantages

- Fail to differentiate between urgency of housing need and re-house most urgent promptly.
- Doesn't respond to consultation feedback.
- Failure to address perceptions of fairness for customers.
- Failure to make best use of stock and resources.
- Failure to operate best value principles.

Option 2 - Retain and develop the adapted features already in the Policy, building in the additional flexibility to take highly adapted properties out of CBL and match manually.

Key Features

Gives the flexibility to remove highly adapted properties and match them to a person that really needs those adaptations.

Advantages

- Most urgent need is matched to appropriate available property.
- Efficient use of resources.
- Those that find it difficult to access and use the system will not need to worry as this approach is officer led.

Disadvantages

- Applicants will be excluded from making the same decisions about where they live through choice based lettings as other housing applicants.
- There will be a loss of transparency.
- Possible perceptions of unfairness.
- Potential for voids times to rise if not tightly managed.
- Relies heavily on officers and officer led approach.
- Resource intensive in terms of staff time.
- Open to discretion.
- Potential increase in enquiries and complaints.

Option 3 - take all adapted properties out of CBL

Key Features

- Take all adapted properties out of CBL and offer them manually.
- Matching applicants needs to properties available.

Advantages

- Those that find it difficult to access and use the system will not need to worry as this approach is officer led.
- May prove easier to match applicant's needs to available adapted properties.
- Possible cost savings in matching appropriately but would also need to be a timely process.

Disadvantages

- Applicants needing adaptations will be excluded from making the same decisions about where they live through choice based lettings as other housing applicants.
- There will be a loss of transparency.
- Possible perceptions of unfairness.
- Potential for voids times to rise if not tightly managed.
- Relies heavily on officers and officer led approach.
- Resource intensive in terms of staff time.
- Open to discretion.
- Potential increase in enquiries and complaints.

Officer Recommendation

Option 2: Retain and develop the adapted features already in the Policy, building in the additional flexibility to take highly adapted properties out of CBL and match manually.

Business Case For Recommendation

- Most critical cases can be prioritised resulting in potential savings and reduction in amount of human suffering/harm.
- All other local authorities with CBL do prioritise applicants using a banding system of some description as the fairest way to allocate properties where demand outstrips supply.
- Increasingly authorities are adopting local priorities.
- Adopting this option will allow the Council the maximum amount of flexibility and control over lettings to this group.
- This option doesn't mean we have to directly match but gives that option.

Lettings Policy Review Consultation Report - Adaptations and the Mobility Priority

External consultation about adaptations and mobility priority was undertaken with interest groups including Choices not Barriers and the Access Liaison Group (meetings and individual responses from members), Registered Providers¹ (RPs) and multi-agency groups. Internal consultation took place with housing staff from Sheffield City Council and Sheffield Homes and the Equipment and Adaptations Service via a series of meetings and a workshop. Responses from the Lettings Policy review questionnaire have also been used.

Overarching issues include the supply of adapted properties and within this, the need to ensure that properties are allocated to the applicants most in need of their adaptations. The Lettings Policy could help to address some of the matters raised. Other issues and potential changes are not policy related and these are covered in the Appendix.

1. Supply and demand

- 1.1. Housing staff say that lack of availability and choice is a key issue; that very few properties come up for people requiring a high level of adaptations, and that housing families where there is disability is very difficult, as is finding larger adapted properties. People with complex or specific needs often have their mobility priority for a long time.
- 1.2. While we have many properties that have been adapted to a lesser degree, they are often not in a location which suits the customer, and we have trouble letting some of them. This leads to rent loss and means that sometimes properties are let to general needs and the adaptations are subsequently removed (workshop).
- 1.3. It was also pointed out that some adaptations are not suitable for future users because the property has been partially adapted for the previous occupant but is not suitable for further adaptations; or they are very specific and therefore don't meet the needs of current applicants (housing staff, workshop).
- 1.4. Where there are major adaptations, all efforts are made to let to disabled people who need them, and Sheffield Homes' Vacants Management Service, Sheffield City Council's Health and Housing team and the Equipment and Adaptations Service work together to this end.

2. Issues and suggestions raised in the consultation

- 2.1. There is a general feeling that the way we let adapted properties is too basic and needs to be refined (housing staff; workshop). Some

¹ Formerly known as housing associations

members of interest groups think that the entire system needs an overhaul rather than individual parts of it.

2.2. The key issues raised in the consultation are as follows:

- We can't always ensure that an adapted property is let to someone who needs it the most -
 - the current Policy doesn't take levels of need into account
 - we don't separate out highly adapted properties
 - our system of reserving adapted properties to those who need them could be improved
- We lack the tools needed to help us to do the above effectively and the following would be useful:
 - a definition of adapted properties
 - promoting joined up working with other housing providers via the use of a register of adapted properties (see Appendix)
 - better information about our adapted properties and information provision (see Appendix).

2.3. Other issues include:

- Mobility priority:
 - how we should treat bidding and refusals
 - time limits on the mobility priority
 - self-referral for the mobility priority.

3. Levels of need

3.1. It was noted that the mobility priority within the Lettings Policy is very general and doesn't recognise levels of need. It works on date alone, which means that if two applicants bid on the same property, the applicant with the earlier priority date will be allocated it, even if the other applicant has more need for that particular property. It was felt that differentiation between levels of need could help us to better meet people's needs (housing staff; workshop, questionnaire).

4. Highly adapted properties

4.1. There is no provision within the Policy to treat highly adapted properties, or an applicant who requires such a property, differently. Where an applicant needs a very specific type of property, or where a highly adapted property has not been let and we want to ensure it goes to someone who needs it, teams may work together to find a suitable property/applicant and then let the property via a discretionary decision.

4.2. Highly adapted properties are a very scarce resource which need to be treated differently. It was suggested that the separation of highly adapted properties could be formalised into the Lettings Policy (housing staff; workshop; interest group). This requires a distinction between adapted and highly adapted properties (see 5).

- 4.3. Some suggest that highly adapted properties should be removed from Choice Based Lettings (CBL) and matched to the applicants' needs (housing staff). Others feel that applicants should still have choice and that these properties should be retained within CBL but in a separate pool from general lettings (multi agency group). Some favour a people-based rather than a property-based approach, wherein we treat people with more specific or complex needs, who currently take a long time to be rehoused, differently, and identify appropriate properties for them (housing staff). Occupational therapists thought that it would make sense to work from a list of potential applicants, so that where they had identified that a property was not suitable for a particular applicant, they would then be able to consider whether it would suit the needs of others.
- 4.4. Some think that it would be the best use of resources to remove all adapted properties from general lettings (questionnaire; staff).

5. Definition of adapted properties

- 5.1. The criteria we use to define adapted properties are too basic and there is a need for a definition of adapted properties to be let to people with recognised needs. It should distinguish between 'adapted' and 'highly adapted' (or 'very/fully' adapted) properties. This will help us to meet people's needs better. This has links to an improved IT system which will be able to provide better information on advertisements, as needed (interest group, housing staff, workshop) (see Appendix).
- 5.2. The Lettings Policy currently says, 'People with mobility priority will be considered first for some ground floor flats, bungalows and adapted houses,' (Section D – Letting Criteria). This is quite general and also means that properties can be let to general needs if no one with mobility priority bids.

6. Reserving to people with mobility priority

- 6.1. The Lettings Policy currently says, 'People with mobility priority will be considered first for some ground floor flats, bungalows and adapted houses,' (Section D – Letting Criteria). This is quite general and also means that properties can be let to general needs if no one with mobility priority bids.
- 6.2. This could be strengthened so that adapted properties are reserved to people with mobility priority, and that only people who need them are able to bid on them (housing staff, interest groups, questionnaire). Some feel that this should be for a set period of time rather than indefinitely (housing staff; interest group member). It was also noted that properties which are relatively accessible, and could be adaptable, such as ground floor properties, should be prioritised for mobility needs (housing staff; workshop).

- 6.3. A questionnaire respondent felt that people with mobility needs not urgent enough for a priority should be able to bid for adapted properties that suit their needs with waiting time.

7. Mobility Priority

7.1. Bidding

The questionnaire showed that disabled people are more likely to find bidding difficult, however forced or assisted bids are not popular with customers and often result in refusals (interest group, questionnaire). A more flexible approach which is responsive to the needs of the individual was suggested (interest group).

7.2. Refusals

Refusals lead to rent loss and mean that it takes longer for people to be rehoused. An interest group was keen to point out that refusals often come about as a result of a lack of information rather than the applicant being overly selective, and also said that properties that are inappropriate for the applicants' needs are sometimes offered (this was also mentioned in the questionnaire). Better information provision would help to reduce refusals (housing staff; interest group) (see Appendix). An interest group also felt that we should have a better understanding of applicants' needs before making an offer of a property (see also 7.5).

- 7.3. As with other priorities, people with mobility priority sometimes refuse an offer of accommodation because it is in an area that they would not have chosen and is at a distance from areas of familiarity and support, which can be particularly difficult for disabled people. People with severe mobility problems sometimes use their waiting time to bid rather than seeking a priority because they don't want to be constrained by it (interest group, housing staff). It was suggested that the Lettings Policy should recognise a degree of area choice for people with priority, but it should be wide enough to be realistic. It was noted that this may not be possible where people require highly adapted properties (interest groups, housing staff).

7.4. Time limits

The mobility priority is a 13 week, 'planned' priority. Many think that 13 weeks is not now long enough to find a suitable property. An interest group think that applicants should retain mobility priority indefinitely unless the condition changes or they choose to give it up (interest group member).

7.5. Self-referral for mobility priority

One interest group feels strongly that housing and other professionals have a gatekeeper role in housing allocation and that they lack full understanding of people's health conditions. For this group, individuals should be able to self-refer for mobility priority, presenting evidence provided by medical and other professionals, where needed, to support their application; and with access to advocates where needed. It is felt

that only the individual can say what the impact of their condition is and therefore they are best placed to self-refer.

8. Conclusion

We can't ultimately increase or change the stock that the Council currently have but we can manage the resource more efficiently. We can also give more holistic housing options advice and better information to customers. This will help manage their expectations and provide more realistic housing solutions.

Some of the issues raised in this consultation can be rectified with the introduction of the new IT system. The new system has much more capacity and functionality and will help combat issues such as quality of description, matching capacity as fields can be detailed to include property specification and customer requirements. These can potentially be matched much more accurately through the new IT system hence shortlist applicants that don't meet the specific criteria much lower down the shortlist.

A new Policy gives the opportunity to prioritise cases more as Scrutiny have already agreed to look at a banding system that prioritises applicants. The new Policy could also affect waiting times of applicants with mobility issues as urgent cases could potentially be housed more quickly. There is the capacity to totally review waiting times and either make them more realistic or manage cases in a different way. A new Policy also gives the opportunity for highly adapted properties to be managed in a different way.

APPENDIX – NON-POLICY ISSUES

Non-Policy issues that came out of the consultation are as follows:

- Information
 - property information
 - information provision and access
- Partnership working
- When and where to make adaptations
- Means testing
- Customer process
- Rent loss
- Supply of accessible housing

Information

We need better information about our adapted properties; and to share this information via property advertisements on an improved IT system.

It was widely agreed that it would benefit customers and staff if we had better, more detailed information about both Council and Registered Providers' adapted properties, and this should be updated regularly. Housing staff and others noted that we need to know about adaptations that are no longer fit for purpose; that are not the right adaptations; and that an accurate and shareable recording system is needed (see also partnership working). We also need to know more about properties that could be adapted (workshop, housing staff, interest groups). It was suggested that we should also find out more about our customers' needs (workshop, interest groups, RP).

Disabled people and their carers would like to see more information in the property adverts, which they feel will reduce refusals and rent loss (interest groups, questionnaire). Staff agree that more and better information is needed. Our current IT system is unable to hold detailed information about properties, which affects the level of detail within the advertising (workshop, questionnaire). Some of the advertisements that state 'people with mobility priority will be considered first' are for properties that are not appropriate for people with this priority (housing staff; other internal).

This lack of detailed and correct information can mean that customers are offered and visit properties that are not suitable for them. It was suggested that information about room sizes and corridor widths can save a wasted visit (interest group, staff). This would also be useful for staff. Questionnaire results listed reasons for refusals and respondents who identified themselves as disabled listed several reasons including being offered an unsuitable property – reasons for which included too many flights of stairs.

RPs suggested that improved targeting and marketing is needed. Although there is a link to the Accessible Property Register on Sheffield Homes' Property Shop website, an interest group felt that a search option for adapted properties on the Property Shop website would be helpful.

A register of adapted Council and RP properties was proposed, so as to identify all available housing to meet the needs of disabled people. This could be via the promotion of the Accessible Properties Register, which Sheffield Homes already uses (workshop, interest group, housing staff, questionnaire). It was also suggested that we should keep a register of disabled people seeking housing so people could be kept informed when properties become available (questionnaire; housing staff).

Around one third of people who responded to the Lettings Policy review questionnaire identified themselves as disabled (with a quarter of these saying they need an adapted property). Analysis of the results shows that people who identify themselves as disabled are much more likely to find access to the system, e.g. registering and bidding, difficult. They were also more likely to respond via a paper copy than online, which may be due to a lack of access to a personal computer.

Partnership working

All agreed that the lack of joined up working leads to both gaps and duplications. These are partly caused by the use of different IT systems, which makes information sharing difficult (workshop; housing staff; other internal), and could be aided by better communication. But some practices were felt to be positive, for instance in working together to allocate highly adapted properties. The need to work in partnership with RPs was also mentioned (workshop, interest group, housing staff).

When and where to make adaptations

An interest group noted that adapting the existing property should always be the first choice. Staff felt that although it is a difficult issue, we should be able to minimise adaptations to properties that are not suitable, for instance where the property is at the top of a hill, the applicant lives in an upper flat, or a single applicant lives in a family home. They said that where adaptations are made in unsuitable locations, they will later be removed and that this doesn't make financial sense (workshop).

Staff said that we need to be able to define what we will and won't adapt; possibly via the tenancy agreement, so that unsuitable properties are no longer adapted. Some hope that this will be included in the review of tenancy conditions (workshop).

It was suggested that more should be done to incentivise moves in these cases. A specialised version of the Smart Move (under occupier) initiative for adapted properties was recommended (workshop, housing staff). An interest group felt that incentives were irrelevant. An RP thought that priority to move should be given to people who require adaptations, for instance single residents living in family homes, but added that this would require a shift in expectations.

At the workshop, staff said that where adaptations have been provided, we should be able to restrict the tenant from moving and then requesting more

adaptations for a set period of time, as long as their circumstances haven't changed. Where the adaptations in a property are no longer needed, some housing staff said that we should require people to move.

It was noted that we should only adapt properties that would be suitable for further adaptations at a later date, whether for the potential worsening of the existing/prospective tenant's condition or for a future tenant (workshop, interest groups). Housing staff suggested designating all adapted properties so that adaptations can't be removed.

Means testing

Some staff suggested the introduction of means testing for adaptations. Other staff felt this wouldn't be worthwhile as it is unlikely to bring in much money.

Customer process

Staff felt that the process can be long drawn out for the customer, who is unable to bid while waiting for checks by occupational therapists, but if the property turns out not to be suitable, they have to begin the process again (workshop).

Both interest groups and staff felt that more time should be allowed for disabled people to make an informed decision about whether to take a property. It was noted that extra time should be built in so that people can make sure that the local neighbourhood has the necessary support structures and facilities in place for them, and that it may also be necessary to discuss the decision with a carer first. It was felt that while some rent loss would be involved, it would create a more positive housing outcome.

Rent loss

It was noted that properties shouldn't be adapted until a tenancy is signed, but once this takes place, the rent commences, so there is a gap before the new tenant can move in. There is some debate about who should pay for this, and at one point there was a draft procedure that said the Council would pay for six weeks then Social Services would take over; although this was not signed off (workshop).

Supply of accessible housing

An interest group member suggested that to improve the supply and range of locations of adapted stock in social housing that RPs could buy adapted properties that come up for sale in the private sector.



Sheffield City Council Lettings Policy Review

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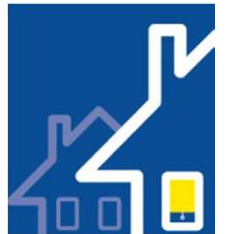
Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee 11th September 2012

Sharon Schonborn
Allocations Policy Review Manager



Topics requiring a steer:

- Choice Based Lettings
- Bidding
- Adaptations



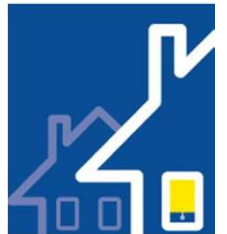


Sheffield City Council Lettings Policy Review

Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

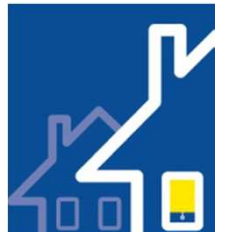
Current CBL System

- Majority of properties let via CBL
- Properties are openly advertised
- A weekly cycle
- Customers bid freely for available properties
- Properties advertised and let according to the rules in the policy
 - 1 in 4 to Waiting Time
 - Matched according to length of priority/Waiting Time
 - Management Lets
 - First Come First Served



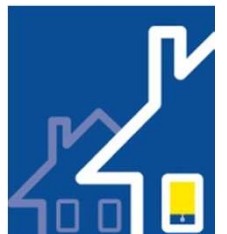
What works well with CBL?

- Available properties advertised openly
- Customers like seeing and choosing
- Fewer low demand properties
- Customer led
- Customers can bid for any area that interests them
- Reduces costs



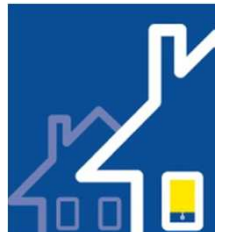
Issues with the current Policy?

- CBL is confused with the Policy
- The word 'choice' can be misleading
- Vulnerable applicants accessing the system
- Choice and urgent cases
- System and Policy from 2004
- IT has developed



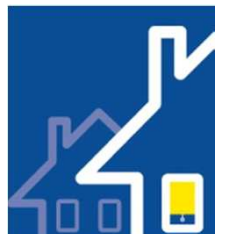
Consultation Headlines - CBL

- CBL is popular with customers and fits with the Council's commitment to choice
- 40% said they had ideas about how the system could be improved
- CBL is confused with the Lettings Policy



Relevant Research

- Most authorities use a CBL system
- Low demand properties have reduced as a result
- Voids times improved
- Ability to manage the register more closely
- A few authorities have moved away from CBL
- They have restricted their registers
- They mainly allocate to need
- They have far fewer properties than Sheffield
- They are in the minority



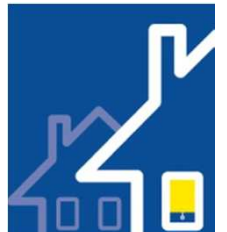
Key areas still requiring a steer: Choice Based Lettings

Options:

1. Keep CBL as the advertising and matching mechanism using the new ICT to manage more effectively.
2. Officer allocations of each property.

Officer Recommendation:

1. **Keep CBL as the advertising and matching mechanism using the new ICT to manage more effectively.**



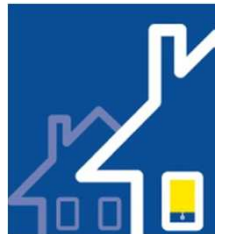


Sheffield City Council Lettings Policy Review

Bidding

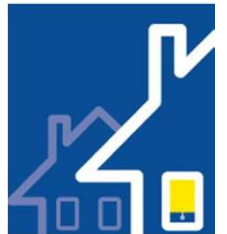
Current Policy

- Anyone registered to bid can place as many bids as they wish
- There is no restriction on how many bids can be added per cycle



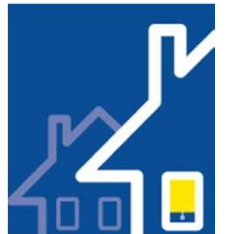
What works well in the current system?

- The system is accessible and easy to use
- A huge number of bids are received each cycle (average of 24 per applicant)
- Vulnerable applicants are supported to bid



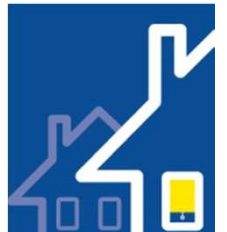
Issues with the current Policy

- Introduced at a time of low demand
- Allows unlimited bids
- Demand now outstrips supply
- Applicants bidding indiscriminately
- High levels of refusals
- Waste of staff time, resources, increased voids times



Consultation Headlines - Bidding

- RPs think bids should be restricted
- BME and older people think 3 bids per cycle are enough
- Some think bids should be restricted to priority too others do not agree



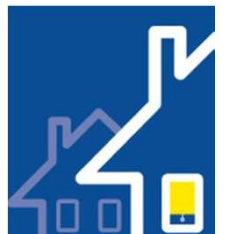
Additional information

Cabinet looked at the issues in Jan 2010 and agreed:

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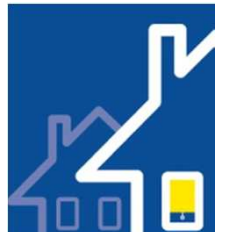
- Restriction to 3 bids for Waiting Time applicants
- To be implemented in the new ICT system
- Further analysis required on restricting to all applicants

It was acknowledged it would technically be impossible to implement on the current system.



Relevant research

- 13 out of 16 authorities restrict bids
- The 3 that don't give penalties for refusals
- All the authorities have levels of priority
- 9 of the 16 authorities advertise everything to priority first
- 9 of the 16 authorities do not place forced bids



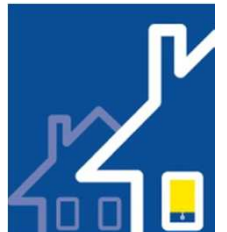
Key areas still requiring a steer: Bidding

Options:

1. Keep the system as it currently is and reverse the previous Cabinet decision, therefore keeping unlimited bids for all applicants
2. Implement the formerly agreed Policy change to restrict the bids of Waiting Time applicants only
3. Extend the restriction to apply to all applicants, therefore restricting all applicants to 3 bids per cycle. Retain the facility for staff to place additional bids, where necessary, for priority applicants in order to fulfil Council's duty to applicants with urgent housing needs.

Officer Recommendation:

3. Option number three



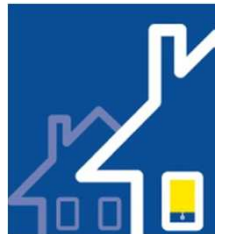


Sheffield City Council Lettings Policy Review

Adaptations

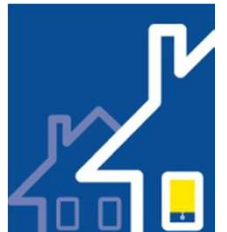
Current Policy

- People with mobility priority are considered first for property types
- Priority only given for a property that will resolve the need
- Released high demand for various scenarios



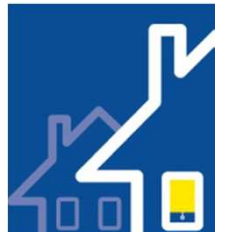
What works well in the current Policy?

- Disabled people can participate in CBL
- Mobility priority considered first for some properties
- Priority given for people in an adapted home that don't those adaptations to move
- Priority to people in a home not adapted who need adaptations to move



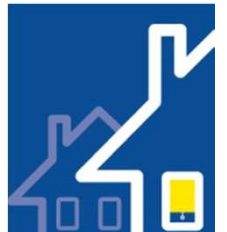
Issues

- Adapted properties let to people who are not disabled
- No levels of need
- Lack of property information
- Lack of customer information
- Unrealistic time limits



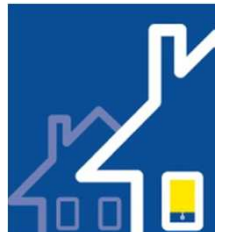
Consultation Headlines - Adaptations

- Disabled people find it more difficult to access the system
- There is not enough information given about the advertised properties
- There is not enough time given to consider the offer of accommodation



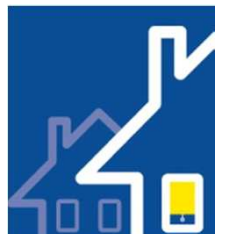
Adaptations Officer Sub-Group Recommendations

- Introduce levels of need
- Separate out highly adapted properties
- Have realistic time limits
- Clarity of information on adverts
- Formalise clear definitions



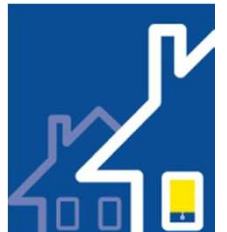
Suggested definitions.....

- **Highly adapted** – more than one adaptation and could meet the needs of most disabled people (wheelchair users)
- **Adapted** – properties with some adaptations - will not necessarily meet the needs of most wheelchair users
- **Adaptable** - could be adapted to meet the needs of most wheelchair users



Relevant research.....

- Best practice would be to keep choice for disabled applicants
- A new IT system will bring enhanced functionality
- Most authorities find this a challenging complex area within allocations
- Good information on properties and definitions are essential



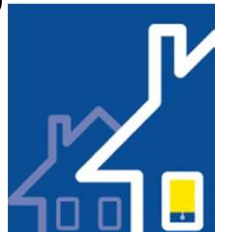
Key areas still requiring a steer: Adaptations

Options

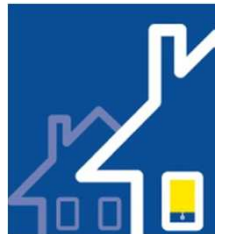
1. Keep the system as it currently is noting that the acquisition of a new CBL system is going to provide enhanced functionality
2. Retain and develop the adapted features already in the Policy, building in the additional flexibility to take highly adapted properties out of CBL and match manually.
3. Take all adapted properties out of CBL

Officer Recommendation:

- 2. Retain and develop the adapted features already in the Policy, building in the additional flexibility to take highly adapted properties out of CBL and match manually.**



Thank you



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Report to Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 11 September 2012

Report of: Richard Webb, Executive Director Communities

Subject: Police and Crime Commissioner/Police and Crime Panel

Author of Report: David Molloy, Scrutiny Policy Officer
Paul McCurry, Interim Head of Community Safety

Summary:

This paper sets out the forthcoming changes to the policing governance landscape through the Police and Crime Commissioner and Police and Crime Panel, and describes Sheffield's response to these reforms.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	x
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	x
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the contents of the report and provide any thoughts or comments on the proposals

Background Papers: NONE

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Executive Director of Communities

Police and Crime Commissioner/Police and Crime Panel

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 abolishes all existing Police Authorities, outside London, in November 2012, replacing them with directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). PCC elections will take place on 15 November 2012, with elected PCCs taking up office on 22 November 2012. PCCs will serve their term of office until May 2016, and every 4 years thereafter.
- 1.2 The Act also confers a central role for the Police and Crime Panel within the new police governance framework, as most of the statutory powers and duties in relation to policing are concentrated in one person. This compares with the present South Yorkshire arrangement which has 17 nominated local Councillors and independent members. Accountability is built back into the new policing arrangements as the Police and Crime Commissioner is elected by the community and the Police and Crime Panel holds the PCC to account, through democratically elected Members, and maintains an array of key checks and balances.

2. The Police and Crime Commissioner

Policy context

- 2.1 Police and Crime Commissioners aim to:
- Play a leading role in how crime is tackled in their force area
 - Bring the voice of the people into policing and bring the community together to tackle crime, and
 - Hold the Chief Constable and police force to account for reducing crime
- 2.2 The PCC will be held to account at the ballot box for the delivery of their community safety priorities to the public. In particular, this refers to the following:

Key roles	What this actually means
Setting the strategic direction and accountability for policing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being accountable to the electorate • Setting strategic policing priorities • Holding the force to account through the Chief Constable, and consulting and involving the public
Working with partners to prevent and tackle crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the police respond effectively to public concerns and threats to public safety • Promoting and enabling joined-up working on community safety • Increasing public confidence in how crime is cut and policing delivered
Invoking the voice of the public, the vulnerable and victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that public priorities are acted upon and that the most vulnerable individuals are not

	overlooked
Contributing to resourcing of policing response to regional and national threats (Strategic Policing Requirement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring an effective policing contribution, alongside other partners, to national arrangements to protect the public from cross-boundary threats
Ensuring value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being responsible for the distribution of policing grants from central government and setting the police precept raised through Council Tax Commissioning services from partners that will contribute to cutting crime

2.3 The South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner will therefore have significant powers. They will be responsible for all community safety funding, including central government funding, and the police precept component of Council Tax. The PCC will decide on the police budget for South Yorkshire and allocate funding and assets to the Chief Constable. The PCC will also have the power to appoint or dismiss the Chief Constable with agreement, but the Chief Constable will continue to appoint all Police Officers. The Chief Constable will continue to be operationally independent and will remain accountable to the law for the exercise of police powers. The Chief Constable for South Yorkshire will be accountable to the Police and Crime Commissioner for the delivery of efficient and effective policing and the management of resources and expenditure. Under these new arrangements, it is clear that the Chief Constable for South Yorkshire will be required to become more financially active.

2.4 The PCC will also be responsible for establishing their own support team. The PCC is required to appoint a Chief Executive, who in turn will employ administrative staff and will have a monitoring role in ensuring that standards are upheld. The PCC will also appoint a Chief Finance Officer/Treasurer to advise on financial matters and the impact of spending decisions. In addition, it is likely that the PCC will require additional specialist support, for example on media/communications and commissioning.

Partnership working

2.5 Partnership working will be important to the success of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The PCC will need to work with the right organisations across the sub-region to deliver against their Police and Crime plan priorities. There is a reciprocal duty on the PCC and relevant local agencies, through the legislation, to co-operate and to have regard to each other's priorities. The PCC may commission services from local agencies, or jointly commission with local agencies, or a mixture of both. There is, however, the potential for significant tension and conflict of interest between the duty to co-operate and the formal commission-contractor relationship.

2.6 The Sheffield First Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership will be the key forum by which the City Council will work with the South Yorkshire PCC.

Relationships will also be developed through the Police and Crime Panel (described later in this report). The Police and Crime Commissioner will be able to require reports from partnerships or bring together Community Safety Partnerships across the South Yorkshire force area to discuss key issues and priorities.

Local planning arrangements

- 2.7 A South Yorkshire Police Authority (SYPA) 'Transition Board' has been established to ensure that effective transitional planning arrangements are in place ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner election in November 2012.

Strategic Planning Framework

- 2.8 A strategic planning process has been designed for the PCC, constructed around a rolling cycle of 4 key stages. These are:

Stage 1: Where are we now?

This initial stage involves a stock take of both current service delivery and resources and will evaluate how current resources are being utilised and weighed against future needs and the potential availability of future resources. This process will normally take place in early summer

Stage 2: Where do we want to be?

This stage will review and, where necessary, reshape the local vision, objectives and priorities. This stage will normally take place between July and November

Stage 3: What do others think?

This is the preparation of formal documents stage, including the Police and Crime Plan and the Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget. It is during this stage, from November to February, that the PCC will engage formally with the PCP, community safety partners and the public and will firm up plans for commissioning or decommissioning community safety services.

Stage 4: How are we doing?

This stage will involve the process of monitoring service delivery commissioned by the PCC

Implementation Plan

- 2.9 The transition from the Police Authority to the Police and Crime Commissioner will have both management and support arrangement implications. As such, an Implementation Plan has been developed by SYPA to aid the smooth transition to these new police governance arrangements from November 2012 onwards. For example, for Support Staff, the transition to the Police and Crime Commissioner will have implications for the 20 or so full-time equivalent staff that currently provide support to the SYPA, including the Chief Executive and Treasurer roles.
- 2.10 In relation to audit, under the new policing structure, the Chief Constable will assume wider financial responsibilities. The SYPA's internal audit is currently supplied by the Joint Secretariat, and the strategic head of Internal Audit role is provided under a Service Level Agreement with the Head of Internal Audit at Barnsley MBC. Discussions have been taking place with the Chief Constable and the Force Director of Finance, and agreement has been reached on the delivery of internal audit requirements under the new structure.

- 2.11 There will also be a requirement for an Audit Committee. Guidance within the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice is that this should be a shared committee supporting both the PCC and the Chief Constable. It has been proposed that an interim Committee is established in advance of November to continue into the new structure but enabling the PCC to put in place his own arrangement at a point in the future.

Establishing office of PCC

- 2.12 Work is now accelerating with the creation of the financial and other management processes that the PCC will require, and establishing a base of information for the PCC to access, to be acknowledged as the 'Commissioner's bookshelf, about policing, the public sector in South Yorkshire in general as well as management techniques. This information base has been split into 5 broad categories:

- Structure
- Fundamental governance processes
- Reporting processes
- Information
- Management techniques

Accommodation for the office of the PCC will be provided at the Joint Secretariat offices in Barnsley.

Communications Plan

- 2.13 A public awareness raising communications plan has been developed by SYPA as there is concern about the possibility of a low turnout at November's election. Turnout for the local elections in May 2012 in South Yorkshire was around 30%, and current awareness and understanding of Police and Crime Commissioners, the general policy, their role and their benefits is also low. In recent weeks, the Home Office have secured £3m from the Treasury to further promote PCC elections and a series of promotional adverts are planned nationally from October up to the election on 15 November 2012.

- 2.14 The Home Office have also stipulated that the role of police authorities, forces and local authorities is to help raise public and stakeholder awareness of the elections. The City Council has developed an elections and communications plan to raise the profile of the PCC election in South Yorkshire. In addition, the SYPA have developed a corporate brand ('thinkpcc') and an independent website (www.southyorks.gov.uk/thinkpcc) has been created providing a one-stop shop for information about the forthcoming South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner, including information about the purpose of the role, the election itself, candidate briefings as well as a section for frequently asked questions.

- 2.15 Other communications work that has been planned by SYPA includes:
- Raising the profile of the PCC election at the Lord Mayor's Parade in Barnsley
 - Identifying the top employers in South Yorkshire to facilitate PCC awareness raising messages to their employees

- Contacting public sector organisations such as local authorities, NHS and South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service to establish how they may assist in raising awareness with their staff
- Working with local authorities to establish where to display promotional material in prominent positions across the county, for example outside the South Yorkshire Joint Secretariat and Sheffield Town Hall
- Sourcing an appropriate venue to hold a PCC Question and Answer session with prospective PCC candidates, and working with Public-i to establish how the event can be webcast live and recorded
- Working with local media organisations to establish how they can assist in raising awareness
- Working with local universities to establish the best way of raising awareness with students
- Contacting football clubs in the region (and other sports clubs) to see how SYPA can work with them to raise awareness of the PCC election

3. The Police and Crime Panel (PCP)

- 3.1 The PCP will be a formally constituted joint committee of all the local authorities in the South Yorkshire force area, and must be locally determined. The PCP will be a scrutiny body, performing a 'critical friend' role. All local authorities in the force area must agree its 'panel arrangements' which include the establishment and maintenance of the PCP e.g. appointment of Members, terms of office, arrangements for co-opting members. The 'rules of procedure' for the PCP will be agreed by the Panel once it is established and these may cover such issues as decision-making and the formation of sub-committees
- 3.2 The Home Office has required all local authorities to submit details of their PCP arrangements by 16 July 2012. Given the time constraints within which these arrangements have been put in place, and the need to ensure the Panel is able to quickly undertake its role, a Task and Finish Officer Group was established by South Yorkshire Chief Executives to work swiftly to bring forward options on the establishment of a South Yorkshire PCP
- 3.3 At a meeting of South Yorkshire Leaders on 21 June 2012 initial options for the composition of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel were considered. The following PCP arrangements were recommended:

a) The PCP should consist of 10 Elected Members and 2 independent co-optees

As the South Yorkshire force area covers less than 10 local authorities, the PCP will consist of 10 locally Elected Councillors, plus 2 independent co-opted members. This is consistent with the legislation governing the establishment of the Police and Crime Panel. There is also a duty under the Act to nominate an Elected Mayor to the PCP where one or more exists at local authorities within the force area. The Mayor of Doncaster MBC has indicated that he wishes to take up this position on the PCP. The composition of the PCP, under the legislation, requires satisfaction of the 'balanced appointment objective'. This means that local authority Members, when taken together, represent the South Yorkshire force area both geographically

and politically in a balanced manner. Provided that the 'balanced appointment objective' is met, each local authority is free to determine which Members are best placed to serve on the PCP. The geographical and political breakdown of the 10 Member South Yorkshire PCP is as follows:

- Sheffield – 4 seats (3 Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat)
- Doncaster – 2 seats (1 Mayor, 1 Conservative)
- Rotherham – 2 seats (2 Labour)
- Barnsley – 2 seats (2 Labour)

b) The appointment of PCP Members should be for one year terms

PCP composition needs to remain both geographically and politically representative of the South Yorkshire force area. It is therefore important that the PCP make-up is responsive to any political changes that may occur following local elections. It has been suggested, however, that local authorities may wish to consider continuity of PCP membership for the development of skills, knowledge and expertise.

c) Meetings of South Yorkshire Leaders should be convened to consider the allocation of seats to the PCP in South Yorkshire as and when required

To ensure that the balanced appointment objective is met, it has been recommended that a meeting of South Yorkshire Leaders be convened to consider the allocation of PCP seats in South Yorkshire following future local election results, but in advance of the round of annual Council meetings.

d) The appointment of independent co-optees to the PCP should be considered once the political membership of the panel has been determined, and these appointments should be agreed by the PCP

As well as being both politically and geographically balanced, PCPs are expected to be balanced according to expertise, knowledge and skills. The Home Office have indicated that independent co-optees will be appointed by the PCP to bridge any gaps in knowledge, expertise or skills. The identification of appropriate co-optees to the PCP will be undertaken once the political representation has been formally agreed and there has been an opportunity to undertake a 'skills audit' of PCP Members. The PCP will carry out a recruitment process during early Autumn to seek to fill the vacancies for co-opted members.

e) Panel Members be paid £920 annually (as directed by the Home Office) for the first 12 months, and the 'host authority' (Rotherham MBC) be requested to arrange for its Remuneration Panel to review the role of Panel Members in 12 months time

The allowance of £920 has been set nationally by the Home Office to cover member expenses only. There is, however, local discretion to review this amount in the future. It has been proposed that Rotherham MBC's Remuneration Panel, as the 'host authority', review this in May 2013 as this will enable a greater understanding of the work undertaken by the PCP. Rotherham MBC's Remuneration Panel will make its recommendations to the full Councils of the local authorities within the South Yorkshire force area. A report would be submitted to full Council for approval and any recommendations concerning changes to remuneration should would agreement from all four local authorities to ensure a consistent approach.

f) The PCP should initially operate to the minimum of 4 meetings per year, with sufficient flexibility for additional meetings if required

This will enable the panel to carry out the following key scrutiny tasks:

- Budget and precept
- Police and Crime Plan priorities
- PCC's Annual Report
- Performance and financial outturn

It has been acknowledged, however, that as the work of the PCP becomes more established, or if special circumstances dictate, there should be sufficient flexibility to increase the frequency of meetings or add additional meetings into the schedule as and when required.

g) That Rotherham MBC be identified as the lead authority to host the PCP and receive the Government funding to cover the cost of supporting the PCP, and that Sheffield City Council chairs the PCP

A lead or 'host' local authority needs to be assigned for each police force area to hold the Home Office budget allocated for supporting the work of the PCP. This budget is to be the same for each police force area, regardless of force size, and is £53,000 per annum. It has not been considered appropriate for the 4 South Yorkshire local authorities to provide any enhancements to this funding package as this will be used to provide appropriate managerial and administrative arrangements. Following a discussion amongst South Yorkshire Leaders, Rotherham MBC has been identified as the host authority for the PCP in South Yorkshire, with agreement being reached that Sheffield City Council will chair the Police and Crime Panel.

h) The Task and Finish Officer Group should continue to meet to provide the necessary sub-regional Officer support to the Panel to ensure its establishment, including detailed work on panel arrangements and Rules of Procedure

The Officer Task and Finish Group has begun to develop draft documents for the Rules of Procedure, based on best and emerging practice, with the aim of preparing a draft for consideration at the first meeting of the Panel in early autumn 2012. Work is also underway to consider arrangements for work planning, training and development of members and the recruitment process for co-opted members. Guidance will also be issued on some of the key areas of activity of the panel over forthcoming months relating to such issues as the role of the Panel in reviewing budgets and precepts, handling complaints and its role in reviewing the PCC's proposed appointments of Chief Constable, Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and Deputy PCC. The Officer Group will continue to work through these issues to ensure the PCP is able to effectively undertake its responsibilities.

4 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

- 4.1 The election of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner will have important implications for the normal everyday lives of the people of Sheffield. The PCC will help to ensure that public priorities are acted upon and that the most vulnerable individuals in Sheffield are not overlooked. The PCC is designed to bring public accountability as the core focus of policing in the city, and across the entire South Yorkshire force area.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to consider the proposals and provide views and comments accordingly

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Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny

Policy Update

JULY/AUGUST 2012

1. Grant Shapps welcomes dramatic increase in affordable homes

- a) Housing Minister Grant Shapps recently welcomed new figures showing a rapid and dramatic increase in the numbers of new affordable homes being built
- b) Figures published recently by the Homes and Communities Agency show that affordable housing starts in the 6 month period to March 2012 were up by nearly 15,000 compared to the first half of the last financial year
- c) At the same time, the numbers of affordable homes for rent and affordable home ownership completed in the 12 months to March stood at over 51,000

2. Grant Shapps: 'Paying to stay' in taxpayer-funded housing

- a) Tenants on high salaries would in future pay a fair level of rent for the privilege of living in a social home, under plans announced by Housing Minister Grant Shapps recently
- b) The Minister argued that this 'handout to the very rich' must end if social housing is to offer the vital support system to those in need. On average, the economic subsidy provided by this to high earning social tenants in England is worth as much as £3,600 a year – a subsidy Mr Shapps said he considers unfair both to taxpayers and those who have been left languishing on social housing waiting lists
- c) The proposals published for consultation recently would see high-income tenants, e.g. those earning above £60,000 or £100,000, potentially paying up to market rents if they want to continue living in taxpayer-subsidised housing
- d) The move could see tens of thousands of high earning social tenants paying market rents to continue living in their social homes
- e) Mr Shapps said that with millions of people languishing on waiting lists, it was right that those who could afford it 'pay to stay' in homes that should be helping those in the greatest housing need
- f) The recent proposals would give social landlords the extra flexibility they need to increase rents for high-income households, and seeks views on whether this is something landlords should be required to do. The additional income generated could then be used by landlords to increase spending on affordable housing
- g) Ministers believe the changes are necessary to address the problem of precious social housing resources being occupied by tenants who could comfortably afford to live elsewhere
- h) The 'pay to stay' consultation will consider the income threshold for higher rents. The proposals are part of the most radical and fundamental reform of social housing for a generation, making the system fairer and more flexible so councils can better meet the needs of local people

- i) Ministers believe that in times of economic hardship, it is more important than ever that social housing helps the most vulnerable in society
- j) Tenure reforms will allow social landlords far greater freedom to target their resources at those who need a social home, for as long as they need it, by granting fixed term tenancies to new tenants where appropriate
- k) New allocations rules will give greater priority to members of the Armed Forces applying for social housing, and will enable councils to prioritise those with a long-standing connection to the local area
- l) Local authorities will also be given new powers to reject applications for social housing from people who already own a perfectly acceptable home of their own – including those who come to the UK from overseas
- m) A separate consultation is currently considering stronger measures to tackle those who abuse social housing by unlawfully sub-letting their homes. And, a consultation has just ended that will give landlords stronger powers to tackle tenants who make their neighbours' lives a misery through antisocial behaviour

3. Grant Shapps: Funding boost for strong homelessness safety net

- a) Advice and support services for frontline staff helping families facing the real and frightening prospect of homelessness are to receive a cash boost from Government, strengthening one of the world's strongest safety nets against homelessness, Housing Minister Grant Shapps has recently announced
- b) It comes as new figures show that council have already helped over 13,000 vulnerable households secure alternative homes and avoid living on the streets, showing that many people are still suffering from the legacy of a debt-laden economy
- c) Mr Shapps announced £3.4 million to the National Homelessness Advice Service to ensure it continues to deliver the vital support services to equip local agencies to help thousands of families across the country
- d) This funding, to be shared between Shelter and the Citizens Advice Bureau, will help provide:
 - o Vital training for homelessness advisors
 - o A National Information Service to keep advisors up to date on homelessness prevention law
 - o Help with mortgage debt and money advice for those at risk of repossession, and
 - o Legal services for local advice bodies like councils and voluntary organisations
- e) This funding is part of the £400 million Government funding already in place to help those at risk of homelessness until 2015
- f) In addition, £70 million has been made available for homelessness services including:
 - o £20 million Homelessness Transition Fund to help protect vital front line services

- £20 million Preventing Repossessions Fund to enable local authorities intervene earlier and help people stay in their homes
 - £18.5 million Single Homelessness Prevention Fund to help ensure single homeless people get access to good housing advice
 - £5 million boost to the Homelessness Change Programme to deliver improved hostel provision and provide over 1,500 new and improved bed spaces
- g) Published figures show that councils helped over 13,000 vulnerable households secure alternative accommodation when faced with the prospect of homelessness
- h) Councils have a duty to provide help for households facing homelessness through no fault of their own and in priority need, and can provide free advice and information to prevent homelessness
- i) Under the Localism Act, councils will have greater powers to fulfil this duty by housing people at risk of homelessness in stable, secure accommodation in the private rented sector
- j) This will mean shorter waiting lists for homeless households, and will leave councils better equipped to help the 50,000 families currently living in temporary accommodation

4. Police and Crime Commissioners to swear an oath of impartiality

- a) Police and Crime Commissioners will be required to pledge an oath to represent 'all sections of the public without fear or favour'
- b) The oath is designed to provide a platform for PCCs to set out publicly their commitment to tackling their new role with integrity
- c) It will also echo the commitment police officers make to serve every member of the public impartially, while at the same time recognising the importance of the operational independence of the police service
- d) Police and Crime Commissioners will work to cut crime by setting priorities in line with the needs of local people and holding chief constables to account
- e) They will bring local people closer to the police, building confidence in the system and restoring trust
- f) Elections will take place on 15 November in 41 police force areas across England and Wales
- g) Nick Herbert, Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice, has said
- 'Police and Crime Commissioners will be important public servants and it is right that they make a formal public commitment to the communities they will serve. Although Police and Crime Commissioners may stand for a political party, the public will expect them to represent all the people in their area impartially, without fear or favour. The swearing of an oath will be an important symbol of this impartiality, emphasising both the significance of this new role in local communities and that commissioners are there to serve the people, not a political party or any one section of their electorate. An oath will also underline the particular importance of even-handedness in an office which holds to account the local chief constable and police force who themselves are bound to serve impartially'

- h) The full oath will read as follows:
- o 'Full name of Place do solemnly and sincerely promise that I will serve all the people of Police Force Area in the office of Police and Crime Commissioner without fear or favour. I will act with integrity and diligence in my role and, to the best of my ability, will execute the duties of my office to ensure that the police are able to cut crime and protect the public. I will give a voice to the public, especially victims of crime, and work with other services to ensure the safety of the community and effective criminal justice. I will take all steps within my power to ensure transparency of my decisions, so that I may be properly held to account by the public. I will not seek to influence or prevent any lawful and reasonable investigation or arrest, nor encourage any police action save that which is lawful and justified within the bounds of this office'

5. Protecting victims of domestic violence

- a) A year long pilot scheme that provides increased protection for victims of domestic violence is to continue in Greater Manchester, Wiltshire and West Mercia police force areas
- b) The Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) pilot closed on 30 June but all 3 police forces will continue the scheme while the Home Office evaluates the pilot to assess whether or not a change in the law is needed
- c) Under the scheme the police and magistrates can protect a victim when they are at their most vulnerable, in the immediate aftermath of an attack, by preventing the perpetrator from contacting the victim or returning to their home for up to 28 days. This helps victims who may otherwise have to flee their home and gives them the space and time to access the support they need and to consider their options
- d) Around 320 DVPOs have been issued since the scheme began in June 2011. The Home Office has commissioned an evaluation of the pilot to capture lessons learnt and explore the implications of DVPOs for victims, perpetrators and criminal justice agencies. The report is expected in late summer 2013

6. 120 councils sign up to keep Right to Buy cash

- a) Well over 100 councils across England, including Sheffield City Council, have seized the opportunity to use cash proceeds from the reinvigorated Right to Buy to help meet the housing needs of hard working local families, Housing Minister Grant Shapps has announced
- b) The revamped Right to Buy, launched in April, offers England's 2.5 million council tenants discounts of up to £75,000 when buying their home – tripling the discount in many parts of the country, and quadrupling it in London
- c) For the first time ever, every extra council property sold under the scheme will be replaced by a new affordable home for rent
- d) The Housing Minister has revealed that of the 167 councils which retain housing stock, more than two thirds (120) have already signed

- up to a 'one-for-one' deal that allows them to keep the receipts from their additional Right to Buy sales
- e) This agreement will give them the freedom to:
 - o Decide on the type, size and location of the new homes they build according to local needs, and
 - o Work with other organisations such as housing associations to ensure the additional affordable homes are built in their area
 - f) The remaining 47 councils yet to sign an agreement will have to pass their additional receipts into a central pot from which they will be able to bid for funding to invest in affordable homes
 - g) But Mr Shapps has stressed the door would still be open for these councils to sign up to use Right to Buy cash to build new homes in their area. Those who sign up by September will be able to keep receipts from July sales onward
 - h) Additional Right to Buy receipts from the 47 councils that have not signed up to the one-for-one deal will be returned to the Homes and Communities Agency – or the Greater London Authority in London
 - i) To ensure best value for taxpayers' money Right to Buy funds should account for no more than 30% of the total spend on new homes – in line with the highly successful Affordable Homes Programme, which is expected to deliver up to 170,000 new affordable homes by 2015
 - j) The cash raised from Right to Buy sales must be spent on new affordable homes for rent within 3 years of first receiving it. If the money remains unspent after 3 years it will be returned to Whitehall to be invested nationally into more housebuilding

7. New powers to tackle alcohol-fuelled crime and disorder

- a) Communities across England and Wales will benefit from 2 new powers that will help them tackle alcohol-fuelled violence and disorder, the Home Office has announced
- b) The government has published its response to the consultation *Dealing with the Problems of Late Night Drinking*. Draft legislation has been laid in parliament so that later this year local councils will be able to:
 - o Use early morning alcohol restriction orders (EMROs) to restrict the sale of alcohol in all or part of their areas between midnight and 6am
 - o Charge a levy for late-night licences to contribute to the cost of extra policing, and other costs linked to late-night drinking like street cleaning
- c) The Dealing with the Problems of Late Night Drinking consultation ran for 12 weeks. The levy and EMRO measures are contained in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

8. More than £30 million for communities taking over valued services and assets

- a) Community groups wanting to bid to run local services or buy their local shop, library or pub will benefit from more than £30 million of new specialist support, Communities Minister Andrew Stunell announced recently

- b) Under the £19 million Community Ownership of Assets programme communities wanting to take control of a much loved local asset will have access to support they need through each stage of the process from forming a group through to preparing and submitting a bid. The programme will also help communities use the Right to Bid when it comes into force this autumn
- c) Under the £11.5 million Community Right to Challenge programme – which became law recently – communities with good ideas for how they can run local public services and want to use the Community Right to Challenge, can access advice and support to develop their skills to be able to bid for and run excellent local services
- d) Around 90% of the funding will go directly to communities in the form of grants allowing them to buy the support they need. In addition to this, funding will support a website and advice service (www.mycommunityrights.org.uk) and telephone helpline run by 'Locality', with the grants programme provided by the Social Investment Business
- e) The new Community Rights give communities opportunities to take ownership and management of important local assets and to shape and run local public services. The Community Right to Challenge gives communities the right to bid to run local council services where they think they can do it differently and better. The Community Right to Bid will give communities the right to bid to buy and take over the running of local assets that are important to them
- f) These two 3 year funding programmes will run until March 2015. Groups will be able to apply for grants under the Right to Challenge from 16 July 2012

9. Community groups to bring 2,000 empty homes back to life with government help

- a) Community groups across the UK will be supported by government cash to bring almost 2,000 empty homes back into use, Communities Minister Andrew Stunell has announced
- b) Mr Stunell announced the winners sharing £25.1 million of government funding on a visit to one of the successful projects in Newark, Nottinghamshire alongside Independent Empty Homes Adviser and TV presenter George Clarke
- c) Newark and Sherwood Homes Ltd successfully applied for a £50,000 grant to purchase and bring 4 empty properties back into use from the Empty Homes Community Fund. These will be a mix of 2-3 bedroom houses and bungalows that will provide affordable housing for 20 people. Mr Stunell visited Newark and Sherwood Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations to find out first hand how they have been involved in these projects
- d) In addition to the scheme in Newark, other successful projects include:
 - o A homesteading scheme in Stoke to refurbish terraced housing
 - o A scheme in Leeds to work with homeless people and volunteers to bring homes back into use
 - o A scheme led by Southwark, Habitat for Humanity to bring homes back into use across London

- 7 schemes from YMCAs to return properties to use, and
 - Renovated properties to provide accommodation for women at risk of domestic violence
- e) In many areas the expertise for returning empty homes to use lies with community groups or voluntary organisations, and that is why the Government is supporting innovative schemes around the country that will allow groups to make a real difference where in the past they have often struggled to be involved or raise finance. £25.1 million has been allocated so far out of a total of £30 million, with a further 20 organisations bidding for the remainder of the cash

10. Prevention is best cure for homeless

- a) A new report published recently sets out a cross-government approach to ensuring that anyone at risk of homelessness gets help at the earliest possible stage to prevent them from losing their home
- b) The *Making Every Contact Count* report details clear commitments from Government to stop the slide towards homelessness in its tracks and ensure that this country's strong safety net of support for those without a roof over their head remains an absolute last resort
- c) Alongside this, Housing Minister Grant Shapps reaffirmed ongoing efforts to ensure no one has to spend more than one night on the streets, with a further £3.5 million for more homelessness help and to roll out the No Second Night Out initiative across the country
- d) Mr Shapps has said that this report will give councils, charities, health services and the police a blueprint to work together to ensure that families and vulnerable people at risk of homelessness are offered help early, no matter who they turn to first
- e) It sets out the Government's clear commitment to helping them achieve:
- Earlier support for young people, former prisoners, and patients with mental health, drug or alcohol problems
 - Better cross-service work between the voluntary sector, councils, health services and the justice system
 - Financial advice and jobseeking support through the voluntary sector, JobCentre Plus and the work programme
 - New funding mechanisms, including the Government's innovative new payment-by-results scheme, and
 - A new homelessness 'gold standard' that all local services should aim to achieve, setting the benchmark for services across the country
- f) The Minister said that this early intervention approach is backed up by recent statistics which show that 199,000 households were last year given help to stay in their homes or find new places to live. This vital support, such as repossession, tenancy or debt advice and re-housing services, can set many people back on track before they face losing their home
- g) A further £3.5 million to 21 homelessness charities will support help and accommodation schemes for rough sleepers and extend the No Second Night Out initiative to 8 more areas – Manchester, Plymouth,

Great Yarmouth, North Devon, Taunton, Gloucestershire, Chichester and Worcestershire

- h) First introduced in London, the No Second Night Out project works with members of the public to quickly identify people sleeping rough locally and provides them with the support they need to get themselves off the streets Mr Shapps wants to see the initiative rolled out across the country

11. Tenants take back power to choose their own home

- a) HomeSwap Direct searches set to hit 1.5 million
- b) Social tenants who have been stuck in homes that no longer meet their needs are seizing the opportunity to up sticks through the HomeSwap Direct scheme, boosting their chances of getting a job, living nearer to family or simply improving their quality of life, Housing Minister Grants Shapps has recently announced
- c) The Minister welcomed latest figures showing that there are nearly 6,000 searches a day conducted on HomeSwap Direct – an online scheme that shows social homes available for swaps across the country. The total number of searches since it launched in October 2011 is shortly expected to hit the 1.5 million milestone
- d) For the first time HomeSwap Direct has allowed tenants to easily look outside the service provided by their own landlord and be given a choice about where they live. With the scheme being online, it has made advertised swaps much more accessible for all tenants and the possibility of moving house just a click away
- e) The scheme has transformed the way in which tenants can look for properties and boosted their prospects of moving – whether for work, to be closer to family or for a property better suited to their needs
- f) Previously, tenants wanting to move were restricted to swapping properties through a scheme chosen by their landlord – effectively meaning only a partial swap scheme existed. HomeSwap Direct gives tenants access to a much wider selection of properties than ever before
- g) HomeSwap Direct brings together 4 internet-based providers of mutual exchange services (HomeSwapper, House Exchange, Abritas and Locata) to offer tenants more choice over where they live
- h) A membership agreement which has been developed by Government and joined by these providers is available on the Department for Communities and Local Government website. This sets out the framework under which information will be shared by providers, the technical requirements of the scheme and the processes by which new members can apply to join
- i) A new Tenancy Standard came into force on 1 April 2012 and places a requirement on social landlords in England to subscribe to an internet-based mutual exchange service. The provider of the service must be a signatory to an agreement such as HomeSwap Direct under which tenants can access matches across all internet-based mutual exchange services

12. Report highlights chaos of troubled families' lives

- a) Louise Casey CB has published a report highlighting the chaotic personal histories of the kinds of families who will be targeted as part of the Government's commitment to turn around the lives of 120,000 troubled families by 2015
- b) The report details stark real-life accounts from families, with experiences often passed from generation to generation, such as domestic and sexual abuse, teenage pregnancies, poor parenting, social care interventions, police call outs and educational failure. It also contains Louise Casey's early conclusions that a whole-family approach is often best for dealing with multiple and inter-linked problems, rather than approaches that deal with single problems or single individuals within a household
- c) Key recurring themes highlighted in the report include:
 - o Dysfunctional and unstable family structures
 - o History repeating itself within families and between generations
 - o Extended family and antisocial networks within communities which reinforce destructive behaviour
 - o The need for one assertive family worker who offers practical help and support but also sanction in dealing with families
- d) Under the Troubled Families programme the Department for Communities and Local Government will pay upper-tier local authorities up to £4,000 per eligible family on a payment-by-results basis if they reduce truancy, youth crime and anti-social behaviour or put parents back into work
- e) The Government's £448m 3 year budget is drawn from across 7 departments in a bid to join up local services dealing with these families on the frontline. All 152 upper-tier authorities in England have committed to engaging in the programme
- f) Reporting to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Eric Pickles, Louise Casey was tasked by the Prime Minister in November 2011 with leading local authorities to turn around the lives of 120,000 troubled families by 2015
- g) Troubled Families are eligible for this programme if they have children regularly absent or excluded from school; cause high levels of youth crime and/or antisocial behaviour; claim out-of-work benefits; and/or incur high costs for local public services
- h) Turning a family around is defined as:
 - o Achieving more than 85% attendance and fewer than 3 exclusions from school for children
 - o A 60% reduction in antisocial behaviour across the whole family and a 33% reduction in youth offending
 - o Progress towards work for adults such as enrolment in the Work Programme or the European Social Fund provision for troubled families, or
 - o One adult in the family moving off benefits and into work

13. Tackling deficit is helping to head off risk of repossession

- a) Government action to tackle the nation's deficit is giving hard working homeowners vital breathing space to get on top of bills and head off the threat of repossession, Housing Minister Grant Shapps has said

- b) Mr Shapps said that the Government's work to reduce the deficit and help keep interest rates at a record low and mortgages affordable, combined with a raft of support to help struggling homeowners, is helping to ensure that repossession remains the last resort for millions
- c) Latest figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders show the number of homes taken into possession to have gone down by 11% on the previous quarter to 8,500, 9% less than in the same period in 2011. This is the lowest figure since the final quarter of 2010
- d) These figures come as the latest forecast from leading academic Professor John Muellbauer predict a brighter picture for both repossessions and arrears compared to his 2010 forecast
- e) Just as the Government is providing help for people wanting to get on the property ladder, a range of support is also available to keep them in their homes. This help includes:
 - o A £20 million Preventing Repossession fund giving every council the opportunity to offer small interest-free loans to struggling homeowners and ensure that court desks can offer on-the-day advice for those facing the prospect of repossession
 - o The Mortgage Rescue Scheme, which has been refocused to deliver better value for money, with a reduction in the grant rate paid to housing associations and tighter caps on property prices and repair costs, to ensure as many people as possible can benefit from it. More than £200 million has been invested in the scheme and is now available through councils and housing associations to ensure help is targeted at homeowners most likely to benefit from it

14. £1.3m to hand power back to tenants

- a) New programme will give social tenants voice to challenge local decisions
- b) The Housing Minister has unveiled a new fund of £1.3m to help give more powers to communities over their social homes. Grant Shapps hopes the scheme will help bring the passion of the Olympic volunteers and last year's broom armies to local communities by giving housing association and council tenants a voice to lead change in their area
- c) Mr Shapps said the Tenant Empowerment Programme would offer a springboard for success to communities across the country who want to see their local needs reflected in the services they receive
- d) This could be by helping tenants learn the skills they need to engage and negotiate confidently with their landlords; forming tenant panels to come together to demand the best value-for-money services; or even to take control of local services themselves if they feel that they could deliver more for less
- e) The Minister also highlighted the benefits to landlords of getting their tenants involved, from community involvement in scrutinising new repairs contracts or tenants working together with local authorities to tackle antisocial behaviour
- f) The Minister invited charities and benevolent societies to submit their ideas for delivering a national programme that will:

- Encourage the creation of more tenant panels – groups of tenants who can challenge landlords, shape services and get involved in local decision-making, and
 - Help individual tenants engage with their landlords on a range of issues and services
- g) A new Community Cashback scheme will also be at the heart of the Tenant Empowerment Programme – allowing groups of tenants who choose to take on the management of services such as maintenance and repairs, to reinvest any savings they make from running these services themselves into other community priorities
- h) Applications are being sought from charities, benevolent societies and philanthropic institutions, as defined by the Charities Act 2006, for grant funding to deliver a tenant empowerment programme to tenants living in social housing
- i) The tenant empowerment programme is designed to inspire tenants to lead change in their communities by having the skills and confidence to scrutinise, influence and control local services through tenant panels and other scrutiny mechanisms
- j) Grant funding of up to £1.32m will be made available from the £8m Tenant Empowerment Programme, announced in February 2011, to deliver 2 separate programmes
- k) This funding is intended to support activities over and above those that landlords should provide as part of their regular responsibilities
- l) The importance of developing local solutions to tackle tenants' problems, including an enhanced role for tenant panels, was identified in the Government's Review of Social Housing Regulation

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