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<b>PART B:</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL</b>
<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>25 MARCH 2010</b>
<b>REPORT OF THE:</b>	<b>HEAD OF ECONOMY AND HOUSING JULIAN RUDD</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>CHOICE BASED LETTINGS</b>
<b>WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 On the 26 March 2009 this Committee agreed to affirm its support for the development of a Choice Based Letting scheme in Ryedale and agreed a contribution of £15,000 towards the implementation costs of the scheme. Officers have been working to develop Choice Based Lettings (CBL) in partnership with other housing authorities and partners in North Yorkshire and have prepared a draft common allocations policy. Member support and agreement for the terms of the proposed allocations policy is now sought. A copy of the CBL policy is at Annex B.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **That Council is recommended to approve the terms of the proposed Choice Based Lettings allocation policy.**

### **3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 CBL is an initiative to make the lettings of social housing more market and customer orientated. It has simplified letting criteria that allow customers to express an interest in an individual property that has been openly advertised. Offers are made to customers who have bid for a property and meet the criteria for that particular property. The Government believes that empowering people through extending choice in the letting of social housing will help to reduce the wider costs of social exclusion and promote community stability. Applicants choosing to live in an area are more likely to settle there and invest energy into their community.

### **4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS**

- 4.1 This is a joint allocation policy between all North Yorkshire housing authorities (except Harrogate), City of York Council and the large-scale voluntary transfer

Housing Associations of the Councils who have not retained their housing stock. In order to progress all these organisations' decision making bodies must agree and adopt as their own corporate policy the common allocations framework. If some partners cannot agree, the benefits and efficiencies gained by a joint approach will be lost and the project will be compromised.

- 4.2 Failure to develop a sub regional CBL would be contrary to Government policy and the inspection regime which expects all letting schemes to be based on the principle of choice. It would result in the loss of the £15,000 contribution towards the development of the scheme and some £200,000 worth of central government funding which has been secured to develop CBL. However, adoption of the CBL as recommended would avoid such risks.
- 4.3 When this Committee has previously supported the CBL approach there have been some issues raised regarding the potential occupation of Ryedale properties by people from other parts of North Yorkshire. However, under the existing system social housing can be allocated to non-Ryedale applicants. The CBL scheme also affords the opportunity for Ryedale residents to secure accommodation in other North Yorkshire districts. In that this scheme is a sub-regional initiative and is designed to improve partnership working as per the Audit Commission recommendations there must be some flexibility of movement in terms of housing choice to meet applicants changing circumstances. Trials of CBL in other Districts have shown that those leaving for other local authority areas in the scheme generally balance the number of people moving into a District. Nevertheless, there is provision to review the CBL scheme if an individual LA has disproportionate level of 'out of area' allocations.

## **REPORT**

### **5.0 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

- 5.1 The Government is committed to taking forward the CBL agenda. The statutory Code of Guidance on the allocation of accommodation states the Government's belief that "allocation policies for social housing should provide choice wherever possible whilst continuing to meet housing need. This is the best way to ensure sustainable tenancies and to build settled and stable communities". Targets were set in Spring 2003 that required 25% of local authorities to have a CBL system by the end of 2005 and 100% of local authorities to have a system by the end of 2010.
- 5.2 The North Yorkshire Strategic Housing Board considered the question of a sub-regional approach to CBL on a shared basis at their meeting on 26 October 2007 and agreed in principle to support a funding bid to the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) for a pilot between a number of authorities. The funding bid was successful and resulted in the City of York Council, Hambleton DC and Scarborough BC coming together to develop a CBL scheme under the auspices of a North Yorkshire sub-regional CBL Project Board. The opportunity arose to submit a further bid in 2008, which resulted in Selby DC and Ryedale DC securing funding to enable them to participate in the project.
- 5.3 A report was submitted to a meeting of this Committee on the 26 March 2009 that sought to affirm Member support for the development of CBL in Ryedale. The report detailed the benefits of such a scheme, the principles that underpinned it and how it would operate in practise. Although funding of £87,000 was secured from CLG towards the capital and revenue costs of extending the scheme to include Selby and

Ryedale there was still a shortfall in funding. Members therefore agreed to make a contribution of £15,000 to the scheme in order to contribute towards this shortfall (Minute number 438).

## **6.0 POLICY CONTEXT**

- 6.1 The implementation of CBL will ensure best use of the available housing stock and promote sustainable communities by empowering people to choose the housing option best for them. The provision for homeless clients within the scheme will contribute towards ceasing the use of unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for the homeless and promoting the prevention of homelessness. These outcomes are consistent with the Council's Corporate Aims and Objectives and with the Ryedale Housing Strategy.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 A large-scale community and stakeholder consultation was conducted between July and October 2009. This involved a joint consultation evening for Members and Yorkshire Housing Board Members, a presentation to the Housing Forum, a consultation evening for existing and prospective YH tenants and the opportunity to comment through an on line questionnaire. Drop-in style public consultation events were held across the County where they were invited to speak to staff and complete a questionnaire should they so wish.

## **8.0 REPORT DETAILS**

- 8.1 The Government is committed to taking forward the CBL agenda. The five year housing plan entitled 'Sustainable Communities: homes for all' sets out the Government's agenda on improving choice for people who need help with their housing:

"Those who need help with their housing should have a choice about where they live. We want to support people looking for homes to choose the option that is best for them, giving information on opportunities for shared ownership, low cost home ownership and social rented housing. We want to end the situation in which social tenants have to accept the accommodation that is allocated to them on a take it or leave it basis. This benefits both the tenants and the landlords".

- 8.2 The shared aims and objectives of this policy are:
- to meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing as set out in the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002 ensuring that those with the greatest housing need have those needs met more quickly.
  - to empower applicants to make their own choices in terms of where they want to live.
  - to encourage and support balanced and sustainable communities.
  - to make the process simple, transparent, fair and easy to use.
  - to provide information about the availability of homes to enable applicants to make realistic choices about their housing options.
  - to prevent homelessness and reduce placement in temporary accommodation.
  - to ensure accessibility for all those in housing need particularly the more vulnerable; and
  - to make effective use of the affordable housing stock, extending choice and mobility.

- 8.3 The partnership will monitor the scheme to ensure that: it is meeting its aims and objectives; it complies with the duty to give reasonable preference whilst also allowing other groups to access affordable housing; it provides equality of opportunity; and applicants are satisfied with the scheme. Partner organisations will routinely undertake specific monitoring of bid patterns with a view to providing the best possible housing options service. Applicants who are in the Emergency or Gold bands or who are inactive or consistently unsuccessful will receive targeted advice and support. Monitoring of bid patterns will also ensure that partner organisations are not subject to unacceptable levels of net inward migration.
- 8.4 The outcomes of the monitoring will be used to assess whether any changes need to be made and to continually develop and improve the scheme. Monitoring of the policy will be ongoing including formal annual review by the partnership.
- 8.5 The principal benefits of the policy are:
- A systematic approach to helping tenants who wish to downsize, so releasing valuable family housing.
  - Increased choice for applicants who will be able to access a large range of landlords and services from one information source.
  - A systematic approach to ensuring adapted properties are let to people with disabilities through targeted advertising.
  - More opportunity for applicants to achieve mobility across boundaries to help access support and employment.
  - Active monitoring of bid patterns to identify applicants who need support and advice.
  - Direct involvement in the lettings process for those supporting vulnerable applicants.
  - Increased transparency for applicants, who will be able to see the available stock as well as receive data on lettings outcomes and supply and demand that will help them make informed choices.

## **9.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Financial  
There are no new financial implications. The initial contribution of £15,000 together with the grant funding that was secured has covered the development and implementation costs of the scheme.
- 9.2 Legal  
Specialist legal advice has been sought in relation to the policy to ensure that it complies with appropriate legislation and government guidance in relation to such policies. The Stock Transfer Agreement with Yorkshire Housing may require some amendment in relation to the duties and responsibilities within the said Agreement imposed on the Association regarding the management of the common waiting list.
- 9.3 Other  
Front line staff will be trained in the bidding process to avoid any potential bidders being disadvantaged in terms of their ability to submit bids for properties in which they may be interested. There may also be a need for some investment in IT equipment (within approved budgets) to facilitate the process.

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### **Background Papers:**

Report to Community Services and Licensing Committee 26 March 2009 entitled Choice Based Lettings. Available for inspection at:  
[http://democracy.ryedale.gov.uk/Data/Community%20Services%20Committee/20090326/Agenda/Choice\\_Based\\_Lettings\\_260309.pdf](http://democracy.ryedale.gov.uk/Data/Community%20Services%20Committee/20090326/Agenda/Choice_Based_Lettings_260309.pdf)

North Yorkshire Common Allocations Policy – Choice Based Lettings – Please see Annex B.