

EXECUTIVE

16 MARCH 2006

SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

SUMMARY

As a development of this Council's decision to have a Guildford Choice Based Lettings Scheme, this report outlines the proposal for a Sub-Regional Scheme in partnership with Waverley, Rushmoor and Hart Councils and seeks authority to enter into the necessary legal agreements to progress the scheme.

In addition, authority is sought to amend the allocation scheme to permit a percentage of annual lettings to be open on a reciprocal basis to housing applicants from the other authorities.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) across all authorities by 2010 is a key Government target. The Council has just launched its own scheme - *Guildford Homechoice*, which went live on 2 March 2006.
- 1.2 A number of existing CBL schemes have developed on a partnership basis involving a number of local authorities. Their success resulted in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announcing last summer that grant funding of up to £100,000 would be available to set up regional and sub regional CBL schemes.
- 1.3 A bid was submitted to the ODPM to set up a scheme in partnership with Waverley and Rushmoor Borough Councils and Hart District Council with Guildford acting as the Lead Authority. In December, the ODPM announced that this had been successful and allocated a grant of £100,000. An item on this was posted on the Members' Information Bulletin on 31 January 2006.
- 1.4 This report seeks authority to enter into any necessary legal agreements with the partner authorities and software supplier and make amendments to the Council's Allocation Scheme.

2. THE PROPOSED SUB REGIONAL SCHEME

- 2.1 The following timetable for the introduction of the scheme is tight and is expected to be in place by April 2007:

1 April 2006	Principles of scheme to be agreed and authority to enter into agreements required.
April 2006	Any formal consultation required to be completed.
May/June 2006	Detailed scheme design and processes agreed
July – Oct 2006	Software implementation and testing, staff training, agency dissemination (Guildford and Rushmoor)
Oct/Nov 2006	Guildford and Rushmoor go live as joint partners

Dec-March 2006-07 Software implementation and testing, staff training, agency dissemination (Waverley and Hart)

April 2007 Waverley and Hart go live

April 2008 Evaluation and review

- 2.2 The ODPM grant covers a proportion of the cost of the software procurement, implementation and licence together with other set up costs and project management for one year.
- 2.3 Once implemented no expenditure on jointly owned parts of the scheme can be carried out without the agreement of all the partners. There will also be no expenditure in addition to that which the Council would incur in operating independently and there may prove to be some savings. Each Council will be responsible for managing its own part of the scheme and although the scheme as a whole may be subject to some common branding, it will appear to users as being “owned” by the individual Councils. Guildford will have a co-ordinating role to ensure each authority is complying with the terms of the partnership. Operationally there may be some sharing of telecom and website facilities.
- 2.4 A feature of such schemes is to offer scope for cross authority mobility for housing applicants and tenants and enable people to move more easily for employment or social and family reasons. To facilitate this, the partners propose to initially make 10% of lettings and nominations available to all housing applicants from the housing registers of the local authorities in the partnership. It is also proposed that any properties that are specially adapted for the disabled, not able to be let to a suitable applicant on an authority’s own Housing Register would be open to suitable applicants from any authority partner, and potentially others outside the main partner authorities. It is estimated that, for Guildford, 30 to 40 lettings and nominations per year would be subject to these arrangements, with 120-160 across all the partner authorities. The mobility between areas would be monitored and there would be a “balance“ maintained between the partners in terms of “inward” and “outward” migration so that no partner has reduced levels of lettings overall.
- 2.5 All the local authority stock and nominations to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) will be included in the scheme, including in the longer-term properties available for mutual exchange and private sector lettings. Each partner authority would retain their existing allocation scheme for their own lettings and nominations but there will be common criteria for those made available to all applicants in the partnership. It is proposed that this will be based on date order of application.
- 2.6 RSL partners were consulted informally during the bidding process and there was support for the proposal, particularly as many of the larger associations are already involved in the existing cross-authority schemes and consider that they work well.
- 2.7 Consultation with households on the Housing Registers about the proposed changes to policy may be required and this needs to be carried out as soon as possible and completed before the end of April 2006.

ITEM NO. 7

- 2.8 As lead authority, the Council will need to enter into a management/service level agreement with the partner authorities and Abrisas, the software supplier. Authority to do this is required if the scheme is to be implemented in accord with the above timetable.
- 2.9 Given the need to progress this urgently, is requested that the Head of Legal & Property Services, in consultation with the Head of Housing Advice Services, be authorised to enter into any agreements required.
- 2.10 It is also requested that the Head of Housing Advice Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing, be authorised to make any necessary policy changes to facilitate the mobility arrangements set out in paragraph 2.4 above.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The sub-regional scheme offers a number of financial advantages to the Council including:
- The meeting of a proportion of the cost of software already acquired for its own scheme, estimated at £11,875.
 - Annual operational savings in the region of £2,000
- 3.2 All the Council's costs in project managing the scheme will be met by the grant together with any costs for drawing up the management agreements, further staff training and publicity. These are based on one year salary costs from April-March 2006/07. Any slippage in the project timetable may result in additional costs to the Council and its partners in 2007/08.
- 3.3 Future expansion of the scheme to include other authorities and private sector lettings may also offer the potential to further reduce costs or derive income.
- 3.4 Once the scheme is operational, any expenditure incurred by the Council as the host authority would be shared equally by the partner authorities. These are expected to be minimal and would be met through existing resources.

4. THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 The scheme is consistent with the Council's vision of choice for future generations and the Strategic Priority relating to social cohesion by enabling those in housing need to have access to a wider range of housing options.
- 4.2 It will also provide an effective, value for money service that contributes to the e-government agenda through the use of ICT to increase public access to the Council's housing service.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The scheme offers greater choice and flexibility to meet the needs of housing applicants and tenants and scope to develop partnership working to meet housing needs across Surrey and Hampshire.
- 5.2 The implementation timetable is challenging and there is a need to progress the consultation imminently and to enter to any necessary agreements with the partners and software supplier as soon as possible.

6. DECISION

- (I) To authorise the Head of Housing Advice Services, in consultation with Lead Member for Housing, to amend the allocation scheme to permit a percentage of annual lettings to be open on a reciprocal basis to housing applicants from the other authorities, following any formal consultation required with RSLs and housing applicants.

- (II) To authorise the Head of Legal & Property Services, in consultation with the Head of Housing Advice Services, to enter into the necessary contractual agreements with the partner authorities and Abritas, the Council's software supplier.

Reason for Decision:

To enable the Council to proceed with the introduction of the Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme in accordance with the timetable proposed.

Background Papers

Sub regional Bid to the ODPM

Members' Information Bulletin Item 31 January 2006 – Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings – Bid for ODPM funding

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