



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Implementing and Developing Choice-Based Lettings

A guide to key issues

March 2005

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CHAPTER 1

About this Guide

1.1 Introduction

The Government is committed to taking forward the choice-based lettings (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, while continuing to meet housing need...this is the best way to ensure sustainable tenancies and to build settled and stable communities...”¹

The following targets were set in spring 2002:

- 25% of local authorities should have a CBL system by the end of 2005; and
- 100% of local authorities should have a CBL system by the end of 2010.

The Deputy Prime Minister's 5 year housing plan, *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*, published on 24 January, sets out the Government's agenda on improving choice for people who need help with their housing at paragraphs 5.18 to 5.21:

5.18 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 tenants and landlords.

5.19 Considerable progress has already been made in encouraging local authorities to introduce “choice-based” lettings systems – a way of tenants having a greater say over where they live and a more transparent allocations process. We want *all* local authorities to operate choice-based systems by 2010 and will support them in achieving this aim.

5.20 Housing markets do not follow local authority boundaries. We are therefore keen that choice-based lettings systems should operate sub-regionally or regionally.

5.21 To increase choice and opportunity further we want to make it as easy as possible for tenants to move between local authority, housing association and privately owned accommodation. We are therefore keen to encourage the extension of choice-based lettings to cover low cost home ownership options and properties for rent from private landlords, as well as social housing. We will work towards a nationwide system of choice by 2010.²”

1 ODPM (2002): *Revision of the Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation*: London, ODPM, paragraph 5.3.

2 ODPM (2005) *Sustainable Communities: Homes For All*, Cm6424, p. 48.

However, the Government recognises that in taking forward this agenda, it is for local authorities and their partners to establish the detailed policies and procedures that reflect local circumstances. Local authorities and their partners (especially registered social landlords³) have made considerable progress on developing CBL since the late 1990s. The ODPM pilot programme (2001-2003) partly contributed to this development. But it is important to recognise that many organisations have implemented schemes without funding from the Government.

The results of the evaluation of the CBL pilots have been generally positive with applicants welcoming, firstly, the opportunity to exercise relatively greater choice and, secondly, the transparency and openness of this new approach to allocations⁴. There are important lessons that can be learnt and experiences shared from the work undertaken over the last few years to ensure that the challenges, such as ensuring that households have access to social housing market information, are positively addressed.

The overall findings from the evaluation of the pilots are also encouraging and highlight amongst other things:

- increased understanding of allocations and lettings by applicants;
- greater relative perceptions of fairness of CBL compared to points systems by applicants;
- applicant support for the transparency of CBL; and
- importance of proactive advice and support service on choice-based lettings;

CBL systems are operating successfully in a wide range of local housing markets. A fundamental message from the evaluation study is that these schemes work in high demand as well as low demand areas. Although balancing 'need' and 'choice' is a challenging issue in high demand urban and rural locations, this can be resolved.

1.2 Purpose of the guide

The aim of the guide, which has been written by staff in the Centre for Comparative Housing Research at De Montfort University, is to help local authorities, registered social landlords, and other partners, in developing and enhancing CBL systems.

The guide does not constitute statutory guidance and does not have statutory forces. The revised Code of Guidance on the allocation of accommodation, published in November 2002, provides statutory guidance on allocations which housing authorities are required to have regard to when exercising their functions under part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. It is anticipated that further statutory guidance on choice based lettings will be issued later this year.

³ Throughout the report, we refer to registered social landlords (RSLs) i.e. housing associations that are registered with the Housing Corporation.

⁴ ODPM (2004): *Piloting Choice-Based Lettings – An Evaluation*: London, ODPM.

1.3 Key Messages

There are six key messages for local authorities and their partners.

ENABLING VULNERABLE GROUPS TO PARTICIPATE IN CBL

One of the key issues that emerged from the CBL pilot programme was the initial lack of support for vulnerable households. There are a range of actions that can be taken to improve the situation through, for example, joint working with the health and social care sector. Local authorities and their partners need to develop innovative approaches to tackle this challenge. This is explored in chapter six.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS AND HOUSEHOLDS IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Considerable efforts have been made by the pilots to guard against disadvantaging homeless households. Local authorities and their partners in reviewing or developing CBL schemes, must ensure that the needs of homeless households and of those in temporary accommodation can be met through their schemes.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND CBL

Although the pilots undertook much interesting and valuable work, an emerging issue is the extent to which allocations and lettings policies (including CBL) reinforce or change patterns of spatial segregation.

An ODPM Advisory Group on Black and Minority Ethnic Social Housing was established in October 2004 partly in response to the concerns of the House of Commons Select Committee Report on Social Cohesion⁵. Its remit focuses on allocations and lettings including CBL. In the meantime, local authorities and their partners need to ensure that CBL schemes do not directly or indirectly exacerbate spatial segregation. This issue is discussed in section 8.3.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The ODPM wishes to emphasise the importance of partnership working in developing CBL systems. It should involve a range of local authority departments, registered social landlords, voluntary organisations and local communities. Schemes that involve only one organisation are unlikely to be able to provide a comprehensive service for applicants. This is discussed in chapter five.

MONITORING, REVIEWING AND ENHANCING CBL MODELS

Although an increasing number of local authorities and their partners are establishing CBL systems, these need to be reviewed and monitored so that improvements are continually made for the benefit of applicants and tenants. One aspect that is already being developed, and which the Government welcomes, is linking CBL with housing options services. These issues are discussed in section 8.6 and chapter nine.

⁵ ODPM: *Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee (2004): Social Cohesion*: London, HMSO, Vol One.

REGIONAL APPROACH

The Government is keen to see the development of regional and sub-regional CBL systems. Existing local administrative boundaries do not necessarily reflect housing and labour markets and there is a need for allocations and lettings systems to take account of this reality. This is discussed in chapter nine.

1.4 Sources

The guide draws primarily on three sources:

- the experiences of the CBL pilots funded by the ODPM;
- the evaluation of the CBL pilot programme⁶; and
- the support role on CBL provided by the Centre for Comparative Housing Research (CCHR) at De Montfort University through its 'choicemoves' website⁷.

The latter was funded from summer 2001 to spring 2004 by the ODPM. It involved providing advice and support to pilots and non-pilots as well as running seminars and workshops on specific topics. Although the Centre no longer provides specific advice, information on the website is regularly updated.

1.5 Readership

This guide is primarily for local authorities in relation to their roles as landlords and/or as strategic enablers in taking the lead on CBL. Registered social landlords (RSLs) will also find it useful as a basis for partnership working with local authorities. In particular, large-scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) housing associations are likely to be strongly involved in developing and implementing this type of approach. It is worth noting that a number of the pilots were developed under these circumstances including Bath & North East Somerset, Kennet and Sunderland. Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and other managing agents (e.g. tenant management organisations, TMOs) will find it valuable in highlighting how they will need to work within the framework established by their local authorities on allocations and lettings. In addition, other stakeholders (e.g. voluntary sector bodies, health agencies and community organisations) may find it helpful when considering particularly how vulnerable groups can be helped to exercise choice.

There are some social housing organisations that are at the early stages of designing a scheme, while there are others who are intending to develop and enhance their existing CBL schemes. This guide is targeted at both audiences.

Those organisations that are at the early stages of developing schemes may find it useful to work in partnership and learn lessons from existing schemes. It, nevertheless, is important to ensure that CBL systems reflect local requirements.

⁶ ODPM (2004): *Piloting Choice-Based Lettings – An Evaluation*: London, ODPM, and ODPM (2004): *Applicants' Perspectives on Choice-Based Lettings*: London, ODPM [The latter report is only available from the ODPM website].

⁷ <http://www.choicemoves.org.uk>

1.6 Structure and Format

The next section focuses on the national policy framework. This is followed by four chapters that clarify the nature of CBL: principles, geographical scale of operation, stakeholder involvement and meeting the needs of vulnerable households respectively. Chapter seven provides advice on developing a system, while chapter eight considers the key emerging operational issues, while the last part of the publication outlines how the agenda should be taken forward by local authorities and their partners.

Appendix one lists the 27 pilots that ran from 2001 to 2003 together with their website addresses and an example of a key initiative. Appendix two identifies local authorities who self-assessed themselves in 2003 as operating a CBL system. Appendix three provides a brief guide to further sources of information. Throughout the text, the names of the pilots who have addressed key issues are shown.

The guide has been designed so that readers can ‘dip’ into the various sections rather than studying the report as a whole. For example, if readers are primarily interested in future directions for CBL they should go to chapter nine, while those interested in finding out what constitutes CBL should look at chapters three to six.

CHAPTER 2

National Policy Framework

2.1 Background

CBL schemes have been operating on a district-wide basis since early 2000 when Harborough District Council and its RSL partners launched Harborough Home Search. The Government's choice based lettings policy has its origins in the Housing Green Paper, *Quality and Choice – A Decent Home For All*, published in April 2000 and which also proposed a pilot scheme to test out different approaches. This resulted in an ODPM pilot programme covering 27 schemes that ran from 2001-2003.

Since then the allocation legislation (Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) has been revised to make it more conducive to the introduction of CBL. The Housing Act 1996 (the 1996 Act) now provides that authorities must include a statement in their allocation scheme about their position on offering choice to applicants or the ability to express preferences; and includes a provision to facilitate the introduction of advertising schemes. The revised statutory Code of guidance on the allocation of accommodation states the Government's view that allocation policies should provide for choice wherever possible.

The legislation and statutory guidance provides a framework for local authorities and their partners to develop schemes that reflect local requirements while at the same time meeting their statutory obligations.

2.2 ODPM CBL Targets

The ODPM published targets for moving towards greater choice in spring 2002:

- 25% of local authorities are required to have CBL systems by the end of 2005; and
- 100% of local authorities are required to have CBL systems by 2010.

The Government will develop this target by working towards a nationwide system of choice covering all forms of rented homes.

From an analysis of information provided in Housing Investment Programme returns for 2003/2004, 78 local authorities in England are operating some type of CBL. Approximately a further 100 local authorities have stated that they intend to be running a system by the end of 2005.

The authors estimate that just over 30% of the local authority stock in England i.e. 750,000 dwellings are covered by CBL schemes; and between 5-10% of the stock of registered social landlords was included in CBL schemes in 2003 i.e. 80-160,000 units.

CBL systems are operating in both urban and rural areas as well as in high, mixed and low demand housing markets.

There has been some uncertainty over the nature of the ODPM targets. The Government's view is that ideally they wish to see a single comprehensive approach in place that covers all of the local authority stock in an area, and wherever possible all the social rented stock. It is likely to involve collaborative working between a wide range of agencies including local authority housing departments, registered social landlords, social services, voluntary sector bodies, community organisations and other local stakeholders such as health.

Small-scale experiments covering a neighbourhood, a single property type or a limited number of social landlords are useful. But they should be seen as short-term to test out what works so that lessons can be drawn for the rolling out of more comprehensive schemes. A number of the ODPM pilots adopted this approach, including Sheffield, that focussed initially on a particular sector of the city and Lewisham Homesearch that concentrated on a single property type. Both of these schemes were subsequently extended. It, nevertheless, needs to be noted that undertaking a small scale experimental scheme may have disadvantages as the particular neighbourhood or property type may lead to a highly specific system that is difficult to roll out more widely, or might not give the range of data needed to judge how a comprehensive scheme would work.

A number of local authorities have expressed interest in moving towards greater choice in a more incremental manner than immediately adopting a CBL system. The Government's view is that local authorities and their partners need to progress work on CBL as soon as possible, although acknowledging that there are opportunities for some quick wins in offering applicants the ability to express preferences in the short run where authorities are not already doing this.

Setting up a common housing register can contribute to a more straightforward and simple system for applicants as they need only register once. It also contributes to applicants being more aware of the range of social housing that may be available. The running of a common housing register as part of a CBL system where there are a large number of social housing landlords makes it easier to provide information on adverts to applicants. A number of the pilots made use of existing common housing registers or set them up as part of the development process e.g. Bath & North East Somerset and Harborough.

2.3 Regional CBL and the Mobility Agenda

The Government wishes to encourage CBL schemes to develop on a regional or sub-regional basis. Some progress has already been made through, for example, the Locata project in West London and the East London Letting Company in East London where a proportion of vacancies are made available to all households across the sub-region.

There are opportunities for groups of local authorities and their partners to build on existing joint working arrangements over local housing needs studies. Additionally, ongoing research on the identification of local housing markets and sub-regions as part of the development of regional housing strategies provides further opportunities to look at a wider geographical approach.

In developing and enhancing CBL, housing organisations need to consider how their systems will link to the new national mobility service launched in 2005, allowing social housing tenants to move around the UK, the moveUK initiative. This consists of an interactive web-based approach that brings together, on a national scale, job opportunities with available social housing. It incorporates existing housing mobility schemes such as HOMES and LAWN (London Alliance North and West).

2.4 Links with Other Policies

In developing and enhancing CBL, local authorities and their partners should have regard to a wide range of related policies including:

- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation: The Government is committed to halving the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010. CBL can contribute to this aim by enabling households to access suitable settled housing more quickly than may have been the case through a traditional bureaucratic system of allocation. When developing CBL, local authorities and their partners should ensure that households in temporary accommodation are given sufficient priority within schemes and are not disadvantaged compared with other vulnerable groups.
- Partnership working between local authorities and RSLs: As part of the delivery of the Government's sustainable communities plan, even closer collaboration between local authorities and RSLs is required. CBL can contribute to this outcome at both strategic and operational levels.
- Local lettings policies in tackling concentrations of deprivation and worklessness: The ODPM will be producing practice guidance on this topic in 2005 in response to the Social Exclusion Unit's work on 'jobs and enterprise in deprived areas'⁸.
- Community cohesion policies: The ODPM Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee Report on Social Cohesion raised concerns as to whether CBL might reinforce social segregation. The longer term effect that choice has on community cohesion is being investigated as part of longer term research into CBL, which ODPM has recently commissioned Heriot-Watt to carry out.
- E-Government agenda and the availability of services such as allocations and lettings online: There are opportunities to achieve efficiency savings in back office functions (such as preparing adverts and processing responses) that can be transferred to front office activities such as housing options services⁹.
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups including linking with ODPM, Department of Health and Department for Work and Pensions initiatives on improving the quality of life for older people.

⁸ Social Exclusion Unit (2004): *Jobs and Enterprise in Deprived Areas*: London, ODPM.

⁹ See <http://www.localgov.gov.uk/page.cfm?pageID=668&Language=eng>

2.5 Support for CBL from Other Government Agencies

There is continuing support and encouragement for CBL from the Housing Corporation, the Audit Commission and the Countryside Agency.

The Housing Corporation played an important role in funding new ideas on allocations between 1999 and 2001 through its 'innovation and good practice' (IGP) grants e.g. initial work on Mansfield's HomeChoice system that was co-ordinated by Leicester Housing Association. This early work was summarised in a review on choice in lettings¹⁰. The current approach is set out in its regulatory framework published in 2002. This indicates that registered social landlords should embrace choice while giving reasonable preference to those in priority need. There is also an expectation that they will work in partnership with local authorities. This reinforces the statutory requirement in Section 170 of the 1996 Act which provides that:

“Where a local authority so request a registered social landlord shall co-operate to such an extent as is reasonable in the circumstances in offering accommodation to people with priority under the authority's allocation scheme.”

Lastly the Housing Corporation emphasises that RSLs should keep it informed of progress on CBL.

The Audit Commission has published advice on its approach for best value reviews of allocations and letting¹¹. One of the key lines of enquiry is 'the housing register, the housing allocations policy and offering choice'. For an organisation wishing to deliver an excellent service, it should have a 'clear policy in place aimed at maximising choice for applicants in accordance with the allocation policy such as a CBL scheme'.

The Countryside Agency has placed considerable emphasis on rural proofing of policies and rural service standards so that they reflect the needs of rural areas. It is essential that local authorities operating in rural areas undertake a robust rural proofing of their CBL schemes so that they do not disadvantage countryside communities. The Countryside Agency has indicated, using the example of New Forest Homesearch, that CBL has the potential to be a more straightforward and easy to understand system for meeting the needs of homeless people¹². Particular emphasis is placed on linking together detailed policies and procedures with advice and support services for vulnerable people and local lettings schemes.

10 Housing Corporation (2001): *The big Picture – Choice in Lettings*: London, Housing Corporation.

11 Audit Commission (2004): *Allocations and Lettings – Key Lines of Enquiry*: London, Audit Commission.

12 Countryside Commission (2002): *Preventing Homelessness in the Countryside – What Works?:* Cheltenham, Countryside Agency.

2.6 Choice in Public Services

CBL is part of the broader debate over the design and delivery of public services. Local authorities and their partners can benefit from this by ensuring that their work ties in with wider corporate initiatives on applicant choice. A number of the pilots were able to make more effective progress on developing their schemes because there was a corporate commitment to customer care e.g. Bolton, Harborough and Stockport. In the case of Harborough, the CBL scheme was launched at the same time as a contact centre and a common housing register in order to ensure that applicants were provided immediately with a high quality comprehensive service.

There may be opportunities to make use of resources that have been deployed corporately to find out what people want, how they want services delivered and actions that have been taken e.g. call centres and contact centres. This could help speed up the development and enhancement of CBL.

More broadly, the choice agenda is central to the debate on the future of public services. The Audit Commission has emphasised that ‘the public want more responsive public sector services and see choice as a way of getting them’¹³. The House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee is undertaking an investigation in 2004/05 on ‘choice, voice and public services’ that includes a consideration of the impact of CBL¹⁴. As Nick Raynsford, the Minister for Local Government, points out

“Public services do not occupy some parallel universe where normal patterns of behaviour are miraculously suspended. People who have choice will walk away from services – whether public or private – if they believe they are not being treated properly...”¹⁵

13 Audit Commission (2004): *Choice in Public Services*: London, Audit Commission.

14 House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (2004): *Choice, Voice and Public Services – Written Evidence*: London, The Stationery Office.

15 Raynsford N, in Corry D (Ed) (2004): *‘Choice Cuts’ – Essays on the Improvement of Local Public Services*: London, New Local Government Network, p. 14.

CHAPTER 3

What is meant by Choice-Based Lettings

3.1 Introduction

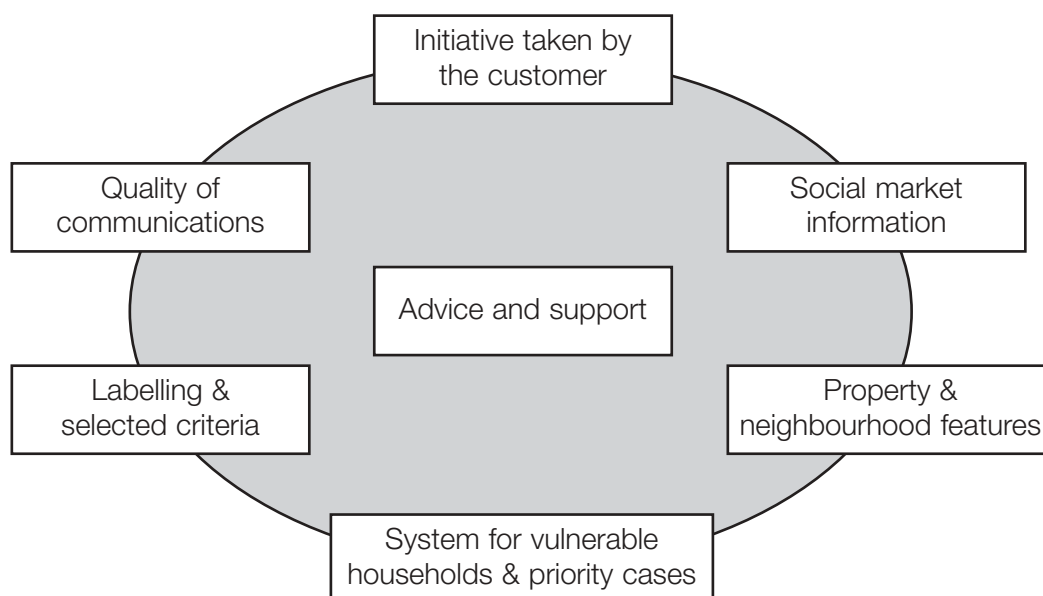
There has been some degree of uncertainty over what is meant by CBL. There are four features that can help to clarify the situation and they are:

- Principles of the CBL process.
- Scale of operation.
- Involvement of local stakeholders.
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable and homeless households.

The principles are outlined below, while the scale of operation, stakeholder involvement and meeting the needs of vulnerable households are discussed in chapters four to six.

3.2 Overall Principles

There are seven interlinked principles of a CBL process and these are shown in the diagram below. A system should embrace each of these principles. For example, it should be inclusive and enable all households to exercise a greater relative degree of choice compared to traditional, bureaucratic, allocations systems. Similarly, systems that do not provide market information through, for instance, feedback to applicants who have responded to advertisements are not satisfactory. But ‘feedback’ could take a number of forms. It should preferably involve individualised and personalised feedback but it could entail making basic information available to anyone, on the number of responses to a specific advert and the key selection criteria (i.e. number of points/band/length of time on the housing waiting list).



Each of these seven interrelated principles involves important challenges in designing the system to meet local requirements e.g.

Choice-Based Lettings Principle	Examples of Moving from Principle into Practice
Applicant initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising all available social rented properties • Enabling applicants to respond to advertisements • Feedback to applicants on their responses and the lettings outcomes
Social housing market information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location and type of social rented stock • Popularity of areas and type of stock and likely availability of property types and areas • Marketing social rented housing • Feedback on successful lettings
Property and neighbourhood information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of information on advertised properties e.g. physical features, location, rent, council tax band etc • Neighbourhood information e.g. schools, health facilities and public transport
Labelling and selection criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labelling of Advertisements e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Matching property type to household type – Local lettings criteria • ‘Currency’ issue re selection i.e. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Points or – ‘Needs-based’ bands or – Length of time on waiting list and priority card
Needs of vulnerable groups including homeless households (see also chapter six)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing advice and support (see below) including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Working with health and social care sectors – Partnerships with voluntary sector organisations • Disability housing registers • Linking CBL with health and social care initiatives such as telecare
Quality of communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper-based systems e.g. local newspaper/free sheets • Information communications technology (ICT) e.g. websites/emails/text messaging
Information, advice and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for applicants on the operation of the system • Advice on likelihood of obtaining specific properties • Support in making responses to adverts • Information on other housing options e.g. mutual exchange, shared ownership and the private rented sector

3.3 Applicant Initiative

A major distinguishing feature between CBL and traditional allocations approaches is that applicants need to be more proactive. It is, therefore, important that the system is straightforward, understandable, explicable, transparent and fair.

ADVERTISING ALL SOCIAL RENTED PROPERTIES

Where schemes involve only part of the social rented stock, applicants can find this disconcerting and unhelpful. For example, during the early phases of the Mansfield scheme in 2000/01, only approximately 10% of the stock was involved. It was therefore difficult for applicants to identify which properties were included in the CBL system as well as requiring them to participate in a number of different allocation processes. Partly as a result of applicant feedback, the scheme was subsequently extended to incorporate all of the local authority stock and most of the housing association properties in the district.

There can, however, be difficulties even for comprehensive schemes. In the Harborough pilot, for example, applicants expressed concern that some properties appeared to be let without being advertised. This resulted in a perception that the system was not as transparent and fair as applicants had been led to believe. The reason for not advertising all properties was that a small number were allocated directly to meet emergency housing needs (e.g. rehousing following a fire or flooding). Following discussion with the local tenants' group, it was agreed that these types of properties would be advertised but with the label – 'For information only – Management allocation – Do not respond'.

Nevertheless, care needs to be exercised over the amount of information that is provided especially where the personal safety of the new tenant could be put at risk.

ADVERTS AND RESPONSES

The system needs to be designed so that information on property adverts is available in a form (or forms) and at a time that suits the range of applicants. Similarly, there should be various ways in which responses to adverts can be made. Only between 10-20% of applicants are likely to have access to the internet at home, so ICT-based approaches will not be satisfactory by themselves. A centrally-located property shop with normal opening hours may not be easily accessible to all applicants. Research on the Harborough scheme, for example found that the property shop in Market Harborough and the area service shop in Lutterworth met the needs of residents in these two market towns but not applicants in the other five large settlements and the 90 villages in the district. To overcome this problem, the Harborough scheme also makes use of a contact centre, interactive website, and a paper-based advert and response system.

A wide range of information distribution and response methods are available such as:

- In-person visits to a housing organisation: Bolton and Sheffield, for example, have property shops in central locations with extended hours of operation.
- Post: Harborough has a long-term contract with the Post Office for sending out advert sheets by first class post every second week, and applicants can send in responses to a specific PO Box Number.
- Kiosks in high profile public locations – although the Brighton and Hove pilot scheme was not based on a CBL system, it put considerable emphasis on making services easily accessible through kiosks in, for instance, council offices including libraries.
- Call centres/telephone hot lines operating on an extended hours basis e.g. Locata in West London.

- Websites e.g. Home Connections in Central London led by Camden has a multi-lingual website.
- Text messaging e.g. Locata.

Local authorities and their partners will need to decide and monitor which methods best meet the needs of applicants. Some of the pilots, for example, experimented with kiosks but found them to be of relatively little use.

FEEDBACK

Feedback is important for three reasons:

Firstly, there is the publication of information on successful lettings. This ensures that applicants and other stakeholders can see that the system is transparent and fair. Property details, the number of valid responses to the advert and the selection criteria (e.g. number of points, band and/or length of time on register) need to be provided. Secondly, unsuccessful respondents will specifically need to know the outcomes so that they can decide whether and how to respond in subsequent advert cycles. Thirdly, all applicants (including unsuccessful respondents) need up-to-date information on recent lettings so that they can make decisions about their search behaviour. For example, it might prevent applicants bidding for properties where they have no chance, as well as encouraging them to widen their horizons. From a local authority perspective, better informed applicants are less likely to put in unrealistic bids or make responses for properties they do not want. The evidence from the vast majority of pilots is that refusal rates go down (although some people will continue to refuse offers even under CBL). In some cases, applicants may recognise that social housing is not a realistic option for them. It will be important that local authorities and partners provide such households with a broader range of housing advice and options (see below).

Comprehensive and timely feedback requires good partnership working and flows of information between partners. It is important not simply from the point of view of informing applicants, but so that local authorities can monitor and demonstrate that they are meeting their statutory obligations.

The Herefordshire scheme is an interesting example of a well-developed basic system for the presentation of property lettings results. The Home Point website provides details of the feedback on lettings from each advertisement cycle. Information includes the property reference number, the location, successful applicant details (i.e. priority card, band type, and relevant start date), and the number of valid responses.

An emerging issue from the pilots has been that unsuccessful applicants require detailed personalised feedback. They want to know their exact ranking for each advertisement that they have responded to. Accessing information on websites using individual passwords and providing feedback through housing support and advice services are both possibilities. The role of property shops, websites and call centres are important in providing personalised information on the outcomes of responses to advertisements. Property shops and websites have been well developed by Harborough and Sheffield.

The Bolton 'homesforyou' service is able to provide information to applicants who request personalised feedback on the weekly bidding scheme within a few hours of the closure of the advertising cycle. Call centres have been strongly prioritised in the large London pilots such as Locata in West London. The East London Lettings Company (ELLC) scheme provides live feedback through an interactive website and by telephone in eleven languages. Indeed, some schemes have 'real time response' systems that enable applicants to track their bids and modify them during the advertisement cycle. But these can discriminate against households who lack ICT skills or who live some distance away from council offices or property shops, unless alternatives such as ELLC's phone line service is available.

Members of a CBL scheme need to ensure that they comply with their statutory duties under the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act when dealing with requests for information.

3.4 Social Housing Market Information

If applicants are going to be able to make informed decisions, they need to have information on the social housing market including:

NUMBERS, LOCATION AND TYPE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

The majority of schemes make available in paper format and/or on a website details of what properties owned by which social landlord are located in specific neighbourhoods, towns and villages. The Manchester Homefinder website provides, as part of its small area profiles, details of the number of properties and their general location on a map, as well as the ownership of the stock.

POPULARITY AND AVAILABILITY OF STOCK

A key element of social housing market information is the relatively popularity of stock by type and location. Also important is the likelihood of it becoming available within a reasonable timescale. This will influence the homehunting behaviour of applicants.

Local authorities and their RSL partners should already be in a position to provide this information pre-CBL. A number of schemes have developed additional ways of providing help and information. For example:

- Homes@Kennet encourages applicants to contact independent advisers to get advice on the sort of properties to bid for;
- Sheffield Property Shop provides indicative waiting times in each of its property adverts; and
- Home Connections in Central London provides a guide on each of its adverts on the estimated number of points that a household would need for the property.

To be able to make informed decisions on whether to respond to specific adverts, applicants need updated information on the relative degree of demand for stock by area and type. They also need to know the likely availability. CBL systems provide this information through feedback on the results of successful lettings (see above) but it may take applicants some time to build up a realistic picture overall of the changing patterns of availability. Care is also needed in ensuring that applicants are made aware that information is indicative and based on past trends. It does not automatically mean that a property type in a specific neighbourhood will become available or be let to a household with, for instance, a particular number of points or a certain period of 'time' on a waiting list.

MARKETING SOCIAL HOUSING

Developing marketing strategies for social housing is a relevant consideration for all local authorities and their partners. Generalised classifications of local authority areas into high or low demand are of limited value. Even in high demand areas, there may be some types of property (e.g. sheltered housing) or estates that are more difficult to let. More importantly, people who are looking for a house may be unaware of what is readily available or that they are eligible for social housing. It is noteworthy that the evaluation of the pilots showed that in most cases as a result of introducing the new system, there was an increase in demand as measured by the size of the waiting list.

Specific measures that have been taken include:

- Marketing particular types of property: Harborough Home Search, for instance, has put together information packs, fact sheets and a video on sheltered and supported housing.
- Profiling specific estates and neighbourhoods to change applicants' perceptions of areas: Manchester Homefinder website has area profiles that provide information (including maps) on education facilities, housing, shopping, health and transport as well as new and proposed developments. The aim is to ensure that applicants have accurate up-to-date material so that they can make more informed judgements about whether to respond to specific adverts.
- Marketing social housing to new or under-represented groups: The Sheffield scheme has targeted students and employers who are recruiting staff from outside the area. It has also put considerable effort into linked initiatives such as 'finding a home service' and the provision of furnished accommodation.
- Bradford Homehunter has seen a sevenfold increase in the number of black and minority ethnic households on the housing register, and a 68% increase in lettings to this group from a low base. A major impetus for the development of a marketing strategy was research carried out in Bradford in 2001 on improving access to social rented housing for Asian households¹⁶. It highlighted that there was a lack of knowledge on how to access social housing as well as a range of negative perceptions about council housing. An action plan was drawn up that, for example, focused on:

¹⁶ Ratcliffe P et al (2001): *Breaking Down the Barriers: Coventry, CIH*.

- reforming the allocations system by adopting a CBL scheme;
- improving direct communication between social landlords and black and minority ethnic communities;
- improving the condition and image of council estates;
- combating racial harassment; and
- promoting cross-cultural awareness.

3.5 Property and Neighbourhood Information

If applicants are going to make informed decisions on whether to respond to a particular advertisement, they require information on the property and the neighbourhood.

PROPERTY INFORMATION

CBL schemes involve the provision of basic information about the property which is being advertised including:

- location;
- property features (e.g. no of bedrooms, heating type etc);
- rent and service charge;
- council tax band;
- landlord.

It should also indicate any lettings criteria such as size/type of household. For schemes that operate a 'banding' system (see below), it can be helpful for the desired band to be highlighted. For CBL systems that make use of 'points', it is useful to provide a guide as to the minimum points level. Some schemes identify indicative points level. But this may not always be helpful – it can confuse applicants who think it is prescriptive. It can also discourage households from bidding if they think they stand little chance of receiving an offer. This can be a significant issue if subsequently the property is let to a bidder with fewer points than indicated. Clearly a balance has to be achieved on providing useful information for the applicant but without being prescriptive and reducing choice. In developing this basic information, a number of pilots consulted with tenants and existing applicants in order to find out what was important for applicants.

Some applicants may need additional information such as number of rooms, room sizes, presence or absence of a garden, the degree of adaptation that has taken place or is possible to meet disability requirements, and the availability of car parking or a garage.

The evaluation suggested that applicants wanted as much information as possible. Photographs of specific properties or archetypes can be useful but they have cost implications for print media.

CBL schemes make property information (and neighbourhood profiles – see below) available in a number of media forms including local newspapers, ‘free sheets’, display boards and websites. Basic information tends to be available in paper form, while more detailed material is usually web-based. In both cases, the format needs to take account of the needs of specific groups e.g. translations into other languages as well as meeting the requirements of those with disabilities such as visual impairment. A number of schemes make use of symbols rather than text in their advertisements in order to ensure that people with low literacy skills are not disadvantaged. Such an approach can also benefit applicants whose first language is not ‘English’. A major challenge for CBL schemes is to ensure that the additional material (which is frequently required by vulnerable households) can be accessed by applicants and their advisors who may not have the skills/confidence to use ICT systems.

Linked to this is the issue of making the ‘media form’ readily available to applicants. Local authorities and their partners should, for example, ensure that:

- local newspapers (which contain adverts and feedback) fully cover the catchment area of the scheme;
- distribution of ‘free sheets’ does not disadvantage groups of applicants e.g. using a central collection point is unlikely to be satisfactory as some households will find it difficult to visit a property shop on a regular basis; and
- material on display boards is regularly updated.

NEIGHBOURHOOD INFORMATION

An emerging issue from the evaluation of the pilots has been that applicants want information on the location of a wide range of other public services such as school catchment areas, location of health centres and access to public transport. The evaluative research on the applicants’ perspectives on CBL highlighted a range of factors including the quality of the area and nearness to shops and services. This type of information has traditionally not been held by social housing organisations. But in making decisions on whether to respond to adverts, some applicants are strongly influenced by factors such as quality of schools.

A number of schemes provide key information on the neighbourhood and local services in their basic property adverts. For example, Locata in West London highlights in text and symbols for each advert, closeness to local amenities and public transport, while Eastbourne HomeChoice identifies features such as closeness to supermarkets and health centres.

Websites offer an opportunity to make available more detailed information:

- Blackburn with Darwen scheme (B-with-us) provides area profiles covering accommodation, local facilities and services, schools and transport;
- Manchester Homefinder has ‘area guides’ focussing on ‘living’ and ‘learning’ accompanied links to a range of maps; and

- Sunderland Housing and Derby Homefinder both provide additional information on the quality of the area and local services for each advert on the website.

There are also opportunities through the websites to have hyperlinks to sites where applicants can conduct their own searches e.g. neighbourhood profiles on the Office for National Statistics website (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>), 'multimap', 'up my street' and 'street map'. For example, the Bolton scheme has hyperlinks to the latter, while Homefinder Direct in East Cornwall links each advert to local facilities through 'up my street'.

3.6 Labelling and Selection Criteria

The term "labelling" or "advertising" criteria is used to describe the criteria which are applied to adverts in order to specify the type of applicant who is entitled to bid for a specific property, or for whom a property is particularly suited. Selection criteria relate to the 'currency' that determines which bidder is offered a tenancy.

The following are examples of circumstances in which labelling or advertising criteria may be useful:

- matching adapted properties, extra care schemes and/or those that meet lifetime homes standards to people with disabilities;
- ensuring that available properties in the countryside is targeted on local households in housing need: The New Forest scheme is an example of a system that has developed this type of approach;
- local lettings policies to help to build sustainable communities. The ODPM will be publishing guidance to encourage sensitive use of local lettings policies to tackle concentrations of deprivation and worklessness whilst meeting the housing needs of disadvantaged people; and
- where a CBL scheme operates a quota system which determines the proportion of allocations which are to be made to applicants within each band.

Selection criteria determine the way in which applicants are prioritised under a CBL scheme. The approaches adopted by the CBL pilots fell into 3 main categories:

- Points systems: This approach has been adopted by Derby Homefinder (see also below), Stockport and Home Connection in Central London. One of the partners in the latter scheme, Camden Council, has acknowledged that their current system is over complex and is currently reviewing the situation with the intention of setting up a more straightforward and simpler points structure.
- Banding, as its name implies, consists of establishing a number of bands or groups that reflect different broad levels of need. Properties may be advertised with a label indicating that priority will be given to households in a particular band. The Eastbourne and Restormel pilots both initially developed a three-band system. Within each band, prioritisation, can be determined by points (e.g. Derby Homefinder) or time on the housing register.

- Priority card system: applicants with urgent needs are given a priority card which gives them precedence over other applicants. An example of a CBL scheme using a priority card system is Harborough Home Search. The priority card is issued for a limited period and, if no suitable properties are advertised within that time-period, the validity of the priority card will be extended for a further period.

3.7 Quality of Communications

CBL requires effective communications between applicants and housing organisations. The latter need to provide on a regular basis essential information on the social housing market, property advertisements, feedback on responses and an advice service. They should be able to guarantee that those applicants who require information and advice are able to receive it as and when required. The former need to have a system that they trust and that they can access easily and use at a time that is most convenient to them. They need to be able to provide information on their changed personal and housing circumstances, respond to advertisements and receive information and advice.

The evaluation of the pilots indicated that most schemes used a variety of methods of communication and often different types of information exchange require different methods. Paper based systems for receiving property adverts are sometimes preferred by applicants, while making responses to adverts is most frequently carried out by telephone – usually to a call centre. There is evidence of increasing use of websites and emails for all types of communications. The East London Lettings Company (ELLC) bespoke kiosk website handles over 1,000 bids per cycle. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages.

- In-person communications in property shops in central locations: This has the advantage of a one-stop approach for information exchange between applicants and the CBL staff. But not all everyone will be able to visit a town or city centre.
- Call centres: These have the advantage of being readily accessible. But it may have disadvantages in that applicants and staff may not be able to satisfactorily complete tasks as information may have to be verified or that calls may need to be transferred to other officers to deal with complex issues. The cost of phone calls is a further consideration – some schemes charge local rates while others are more expensive.
- ICT solutions: The advantage is that detailed and complex information can be made available to the applicant. But it is important to note that most surveys of social housing tenants show that only between 10-20% have access to the internet at home. Of course, applicants may be able to use learn direct centres, libraries and facilities at other locations, but this may not always be convenient.
- Paper-based systems including special newsletters or leaflets which are made available to applicants in various ways (including through the post), and sections in local newspapers, are a good way getting information to most applicants. The advantage of a postal system is its regularity and its certainty in delivery. It does not require applicants to remember to visit a local distribution centre such as a property shop or to ‘visit’ a website.

The challenge for all communication systems is ensuring that information and advice regularly reaches people who require it.

A balance, nevertheless, has to be achieved between access and cost effectiveness. Schemes must ensure as wide an access as is possible within cost constraints. A single 'solution' such as a property shop or a website may not meet the needs of all applicants. Local authorities and their partners should consider the potential of linking into other initiatives such as corporate call centres and customer contact centres that have been or are being developed as part of the modernising local government and public services agendas.

3.8 Information, Advice and Support

There are a number of issues. These include providing information on how schemes operate, advising applicants on the likelihood of specific properties or types of properties becoming available, helping applicants to respond to adverts, and more generally linking CBL to a housing options approach.

Housing authorities have a statutory duty to make their allocation scheme available for inspection. Where they operate a CBL scheme, they should ensure that details about the scheme and how it operates are easily accessible, for example on their website.

Customers often request detailed information and advice on the likelihood of specific types of properties in a local area becoming available, as well as help in responding to adverts. Landlords need to ensure that in providing advice which helps an applicant to make his or her own decision on what property to bid for, they do not seek to influence an applicant's choice.

Many schemes, such as Harborough Home Search, have targeted additional advice and support on groups such as older persons and/or on households who have not been active in responding to adverts.

An increasing range of local authorities and their partners particularly in generally high or mixed demand areas have progressed work on a housing options approach. The Government welcomes this initiative and views it as an important way forward for CBL (see chapter nine). The underlying principle is that applicants can make more informed decisions if they are provided with a wider range of options for tackling their housing needs.

CHAPTER 4

Scale of Operation

4.1 Introduction

Local authorities and their partners should take a comprehensive approach on CBL. Ideally schemes should involve:

- a broad geographical area (at least the local authority area, but also, increasingly, a move to sub-regional schemes which cover existing housing markets);
- a wide range of property types including all social rented housing; and
- all social housing organisations in that area.

It is appreciated that achieving this scale of operation in one step is challenging. There are some advantages in setting up a small scale scheme that can later be extended to include a wider area and more social housing landlords. But as has already been pointed out, rolling out a limited scheme on a broader basis is not straightforward and simple. What works in one neighbourhood with a particular pattern of supply and demand or for one type of accommodation or one landlord may not be relevant on a wider scale.

If a small scale scheme is to be established as a pilot learning exercise, the local authority and its partners need to have a vision of setting up and delivering a comprehensive scheme as soon as possible.

4.2 Geographical Area

The geographical scale of operation of the pilots in many cases was increased during the two year period. By the end of March 2003, they could be classified into four types:

- Initial neighbourhood or small-area schemes e.g.
 - Mansfield: This began with about 10% of the social rented stock and following an evaluation that highlighted customer dissatisfaction with the complex range of allocation schemes, was rolled out borough-wide¹⁷; and
 - Sheffield (which initially focussed on one sector of the city but is now operating at a city-wide scale).
- District/borough-wide schemes e.g. Bradford Homehunter and New Forest Homesearch.

¹⁷ Brown T et al (2001): *HomeChoice – Choice-Based Lettings in Practice*: Birmingham, People for Action.

- CBL schemes involving a number of local authorities and RSLs sharing common back office functions. An example of this is Home Connections in Central London that covers parts of the stock in five London Boroughs. It involves shared/common ICT but each partner operates their own front office approach. The Homefinder Direct scheme run by Ocean Housing (formerly Restormel Housing Trust) in Cornwall has adopted a similar approach and covers three districts – North Cornwall, Restormel, and Caradon.
- Cross-boundary CBL schemes where a proportion of lettings are available to eligible applicants throughout the sub-region. One of the early examples of was the Locata pilot in West London that involved 20% of lettings being made available on a sub-regional basis. More recently, the East London Lettings Company scheme (covering Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest) has introduced a cross-boundary initiative.

‘CROSS BOUNDARY’ SCHEMES

The majority of the pilot schemes operated at a district/borough level. However, local authority administrative boundaries do not necessarily reflect local housing and labour markets.

While, many applicants will wish to move only very small distances within the same local authority area, some applicants (particularly those living close to local authority boundaries) may want to move to a neighbouring authority. Furthermore, other applicants may be willing and want to consider longer-distance moves. Sub-regional and regional CBL schemes enable them to make more informed decisions about this option. The most appropriate way of developing schemes on a wider geographical basis is for groups of local authorities and their partner RSLs to take the initiative and explore the issues. A useful starting point for such discussions is to reflect on the implications of the seven principles that were outlined in the previous chapter. For example, from a property and neighbourhood perspective, the larger the geographical area of operation the greater the need for neighbourhood information. The most challenging issue is likely to relate to selection criteria. Sub-regional or regional systems that merely provide a common back office solution enabling each local authority area to operate independently may deliver greater efficiencies in the operation of CBL, but do not allow for cross boundary movement. For this to happen, such schemes must allow at least for a proportion of lettings to be advertised and available for eligible households across the area irrespective of which district they live in. The potential and challenges of regional and sub-regional CBL are discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

MOBILITY AND CHOICE

It is worth reiterating that there has been increasing interest in promoting and enhancing national mobility schemes such as HOMES and LAWN (London Alliance West and North). The Government’s moveUK initiative incorporates these existing schemes. It is important that local authorities and their partners who are either running or developing CBL systems consider how they can participate in this initiative.

4.3 Property

A number of the pilots operated schemes that focussed on a limited number of property types (e.g. Lewisham Homesearch which concentrated on one bed flats and studio flats). While this may be a way for social landlords to test out CBL, the goal should be for schemes to be comprehensive and cover all of the social rented stock in a geographical area.

Indeed, a number of the pilots have gone further and have included information about other property types. For example, marketing shared ownership accommodation has been part of the approach adopted by New Forest HomeSearch, which has a specific part of its website devoted to this type of property. Homes@Kennet features both shared ownership and low cost home ownership properties and the website includes a video clip of typical shared ownership properties as well as a 'virtual tour'.

Another development is the promotion of mutual exchange schemes. This gives existing tenants a further option rather than relying on transfers as part of a CBL approach. Bradford Homehunter, for example, has established an on-line home swap system. Further information on this type of initiative can be found in a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report¹⁸.

There has also been considerable interest in the possibility of advertising private rented property as an additional part of CBL schemes. Relatively little progress has been made so far, although Harborough Home Search has recently begun a small scale scheme covering private rented properties. More generally, there may be opportunities to explore this type of initiative as part of the changing regulatory framework for the private rented sector in the context of the Housing Act 2004.

4.4 Involving RSLs

Although many of the pilots involved local authority stock (where appropriate) and property owned by RSLs, a number of schemes did not involve all of the social rented stock in an area. From an applicant perspective, this is unsatisfactory as it means that there are likely to be a number of allocation schemes operating in a single area. Ideally, where this is possible, all social rented property in a geographical area should be within a single CBL system.

On average, there are approximately 20 RSLs operating in each local authority area in England and it is therefore challenging to reach a consensus between social housing landlords on the detailed policies and procedures for CBL. Nevertheless some of the pilots made excellent progress in a limited amount of time in successfully involving a large number of RSLs. For example, Derby Homefinder drew in over 90% of social housing landlords by early 2003.

¹⁸ Jones M and Sinclair F (2002): *Doing it for Themselves – Mutual Exchanges and Tenant Mobility*; York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

There have been concerns expressed that some RSLs may be reluctant to participate in CBL schemes which bring together a number of social landlords because of the fear of the loss of independence. In fact, the reality among the majority of the pilots is that each landlord has kept its own criteria for labelling properties as well as the processes and procedures for making a tenancy offer. However, it is important to have the same prioritisation criteria wherever possible, for a number of reasons – transparency, fairness, and to ensure that the local authority can discharge its allocation and homelessness functions.

It can be a major challenge for local authorities to work with a large number of RSLs in developing a CBL scheme. Attempting to impose specific policies and procedures is an inappropriate way forward. A consensus building approach is required so that the ideas and concerns of the RSLs (and other partners) are adequately considered. The experience of a number of the pilots was that a much greater time allowance ought to have been built into the development process. A number of schemes took 12-18 months to develop partly because of the need to adopt an inclusive approach to partnership working. In some cases progressing with a few partners to the point that there is a working system was an effective means of working towards a comprehensive approach – as it allowed other RSLs to see an operational system and buy into it. One way forward is, therefore, to agree at a strategic and developmental level on a comprehensive approach, which is then implemented in stages.

A further concern especially among regional and national RSLs, which are committed to the principles of greater choice in lettings, is that if each local authority (and its partners) develops a different CBL system, this will create major administrative, financial and management problems. National and regional RSLs could find themselves working with 100 or more different systems. This is clearly a valid concern as multiple systems create additional costs for RSLs. The development of sub-regional or regional CBL – schemes will partly alleviate this concern as well as contributing to efficiency savings for all partners. Local authorities and their partner RSLs are encouraged to pursue this approach (see chapter nine). Nevertheless, national RSLs will need to plan to participate in a number of regional and sub-regional systems.

It should be noted that the development of CBL systems by national and regional RSLs independent of those run by local authorities and their partners on a district-wide basis is likely to create confusion among applicants who would need to participate in a number of different schemes. It would be far more preferable for RSLs to work in partnership with groups of local authorities.

Overall, comprehensive CBL schemes benefit from the participation and active involvement of a range of organisations including RSLs and local authority departments in the development and delivery of approaches that meet the needs of applicants and tenants.

CHAPTER 5

Partnership Working

5.1 Importance of Partnerships

Partnership working between a wide range of stakeholders is essential in designing and delivering an inclusive scheme that meets local requirements. Although it may be quicker for a single organisation to develop an individual system, getting buy-in from other agencies later on can be problematic because it might require substantial changes in policies and procedures.

In some circumstances, a single organisation taking the lead may be the best way forward. But such an approach should be seen as a first step towards a comprehensive approach. More importantly, from an applicant viewpoint, a proliferation of different allocations schemes is unhelpful.

From sub-regional and regional perspectives, partnership working is crucial. But it may be necessary for a single organisation to take the initiative. Restormel Housing Trust (now Ocean Housing) has been prominent in the development of cross-boundary approach in East Cornwall, while Harborough District Council has been taking the lead role in promoting a Welland Sub-Regional CBL scheme.

Joint working has many potential advantages:

- making use of and extending existing partnerships such as local authority and housing association liaison groups;
- drawing on the skills and expertise of a wide range of organisations such as voluntary sector agencies who work with specific vulnerable groups;
- opening up opportunities for making use of resources from non-housing streams such as e-government; and
- generating innovative ways of tackling specific issues.

The Government, therefore, places considerable importance on the process of partnership working. But it is up to local authorities and their partners to agree an appropriate way forward.

5.2 Taking the Lead

Partnership and collaborative working should be initiated during the early stages of the development process (see chapter seven). As schemes are likely to involve a number of RSL landlords in an area, as well as the local authority in its strategic enabling (and, in some cases, landlord) role, it would normally be expected that the latter would take the lead on CBL. Even where the local authority has transferred its stock and/or contracted out the allocation function, the authority still has an important role to play in shaping the CBL system. This reflects its strategic enabling role in housing and that the local authority retains important duties under the allocation and homelessness legislation.

There are also other reasons why local authorities should normally take the lead:

- more effective collaboration with other policy areas e.g. supporting people, urban and rural regeneration, e-government and customer services;
- ready access to information on the local housing market such as the relative degree of popularity of different neighbourhoods; and
- links with the community leadership role of councils through local strategic partnerships and community plans.

5.3 Which Partners?

The details of partnership working are a matter for local circumstances. Consideration should be given to the involvement of a wide range of organisations including:

- RSLs with housing stock in the area: Ideally all social housing landlords should be involved in a CBL system and Derby Homefinder, for instance, included 90% of social housing organisations in the scheme by early 2003. The 'homesforyou' scheme built on the close working relationship between the Council and RSLs through the Bolton Community Homes Partnership that involves the local authority and nine RSLs.
- All organisations which manage housing on behalf of social landlords – in particular ALMOs and TMOs – should be involved as partners in the development and delivery of CBL schemes.
- Social services: There is a strong case for involving social services so that the needs of vulnerable groups are built into the policies and practices of the system. The Blackburn with Darwen scheme involved social services as an equal partner. This has resulted in a close working relationship on policies and procedures for dealing with adaptations, care packages in the home, links with care networks and better working relationships with voluntary sector bodies. It has been achieved partly because of the unitary authority status that has made joint working easier. But equally important has been the recognition of a common agenda between housing and social services on more effectively meeting the needs of vulnerable households.
- Other local authority departments e.g. E-government and ICT: Although they may not be directly involved in running CBL, they will be able to provide expertise and advice on software and hardware as well as potentially linking in to national e-government projects.
- Supporting people teams: In the case of district councils, these are likely to be located in county council social services departments, while for unitary authorities they will be in-house. They develop and deliver policies for specific needs groups and are, therefore, vital in ensuring joined-up thinking between CBL and other housing and support-related services.

- Health and social care sector including primary care trusts (PCTs) and the Probation Service: Although few of the pilots involved this sector in the development phase, there is a strong case for their inclusion in designing systems that meet the needs of vulnerable groups e.g. medical priority, tackling bed-blocking and helping to ensure that people can remain in their own home. The Bolton scheme has involved close working relationships with the Probation Service.
- Voluntary sector organisations: Organisations such as Shelter, citizens advice bureaux (CABs), local race equality organisations and disabled persons housing services are centrally involved in providing housing advice and support services. It is, therefore, essential that these agencies contribute to the development and running of schemes. Shelter, for example, was actively involved in three pilots – Croydon, Sheffield and Stockport. It is important that local authorities and their partners adopt a comprehensive approach and liaise with organisations working with a wide range of vulnerable groups as well as the users of these services, for example:
 - people who have drug and alcohol difficulties (e.g. local community drug and alcohol teams based in social services departments);
 - people leaving care through leaving care teams; and
 - travellers through local gypsy liaison officers.

See chapter six for a fuller discussion on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups.

- Community and tenants involvement: As the potential customers of CBL schemes, tenants groups and individuals are essential in developing and monitoring schemes. They are likely to have concerns and ideas on CBL. Again, because of the limited timeframe for the pilots, many had difficulties in involving groups and individuals in the development stage as fully as they had intended. An exception was Bradford Homehunter who worked closely with black and minority ethnic community organisations to ensure that the scheme met their needs re access to social housing. Homes@Kennet consulted widely on developing its system and set up a number of working groups to validate and verify proposals. They found that it was important to bring forward suggestions and draft proposals to these groups rather than expecting them to devise policies and procedures. Nevertheless, where tenants choose, they should have a proactive role in developing policies and procedures on CBL. A key message is that tenants and potential tenants should be involved in both strategic and operational development of schemes and that this should take place at an early stage. It is important that local authorities and their partners should develop their involvement strategy in line with best practice on tenant participation as well as with the principles of their tenant compact.

CHAPTER 6

Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People

6.1 Introduction

CBL systems must be developed in a way which takes account of the needs of vulnerable groups, including homeless households. This has been a major feature of Government policy since the Housing Green Paper in April 2000, which stated that

“Housing and social services authorities should liaise with each other and both should play an active role in helping the most vulnerable people to exercise their choice of suitable housing with appropriate support services being provided where necessary”

There are also a wide range of housing, health and social care policies and practices that should be linked into the development and delivery of CBLs (see also section 2.4). These include:

- single assessment process (SAP) as part of the National Service Framework for Older People, which aims to avoid duplication of assessments;
- minimising the use of temporary accommodation for homeless households, particularly for families with children;
- meeting the needs of people suffering from domestic violence especially accommodation and support needs; and
- initiatives by the Social Exclusion Unit to address the housing needs of, for instance, people with mental health problems and reducing re-offending by addressing the housing needs of prisoners.

The evaluation of the pilots indicated that one of the weakest elements was the provision of support to vulnerable and excluded households with a number of schemes failing to develop satisfactory mechanisms prior to their launching.

6.2 Clarifying and Addressing Vulnerability

Many vulnerable and excluded people may have difficulties in participating in CBL schemes, for a variety of reasons. There are a number of groups who are recognised as being vulnerable because they have acknowledged housing support and/or social care requirements such as older people, homeless households, people with learning difficulties, people with mental health problems, people with mobility difficulties, care leavers, people with HIV/AIDS and their carers, and those suffering domestic violence. But it is essential that CBL schemes take as wide a perspective as possible and consider the needs of all groups who may be excluded from or have difficulty in participating in a CBL scheme, including for example, people with drug and alcohol problems, travellers, ex-offenders.

From a CBL perspective, households may be excluded because, for example, they are:

- unaware of information about the social housing market and property/neighbourhoods;
- unable to make use of the bidding/response mechanism to advertisements; and
- lacking the support to exercise choice and adopt a realistic homehunting strategy.

CBL may create additional inequalities. For example, a reliance on paper/text-based information may disadvantage people who have literacy difficulties, those with visual impairment, and households where 'english' is not the first language. Systems which depend primarily on ICT, may exclude people who do not have access to or the skills or the confidence to use technology. It is important that CBL does not reinforce the digital divide. Schemes that place an emphasis on property shops can disadvantage households living some distance away from town or city centres as well as those who have mobility difficulties. Lack of advice and support can preclude vulnerable households from making valid and realistic choices in response to adverts.

There are a number of ways in which some of these detailed and important challenges can be addressed. For instance:

- websites (and other media) need to be fully compliant with the principles of the Disability Discrimination legislation.
- information needs to be available through a range of methods with each geared to the needs of vulnerable and excluded groups.

The East London Lettings Company (ELLC) makes information available in 11 languages (as well as British sign language) through a multi-media multi-lingual online service. There are 'help' videos on the ELLC system, website content and paper-based information available in these languages.

- Advice and support can be targeted on specific groups. A number of schemes such as ELLC and Harborough Home Search have focussed on the needs of older people. The former provide hyperlinks to the Elderly Accommodation Counsel, while the latter has produced a video as well as information sheets on CBL and the types of accommodation available.

More generally, schemes that involve merely the replacement of a traditional allocations system with CBL are unlikely to meet the needs of vulnerable and excluded households. Rethinking the way that information and support is provided is an essential ingredient of the development and improvement process. Local authorities and their partners should adopt a proactive stance. This could involve an assessment for each vulnerable group of how the principles (set out in chapter three) can be achieved. This analysis should involve both users and groups representing vulnerable and excluded households. The following table illustrates how the principles can be addressed:

CBL Principles	Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable and Excluded Households
Proactive applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising housing with support packages • Individual feedback to vulnerable and excluded applicants on bidding • Specific and highlighted feedback on lettings of adapted properties, sheltered housing etc
Social housing market information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on number/type/location of adapted properties, sheltered housing and lifetime homes • Policy on and resources for adapting properties
Property and neighbourhood information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property features including degree of adaptation • Location of health centres and other facilities/services
Labelling and selection criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserving specific types of property (e.g. lifetime homes) for vulnerable groups and selection based on 'best fit on meeting needs' criteria • Priority system using time-limited cards, bands, or points to ensure that priority is given to those in the greatest housing need • Building in procedures, such as medical assessment panels, to ensure that sufficient priority is given to people with medical needs
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information and enabling responses to be made in a form that best suits vulnerable and excluded groups
Advice and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help in making choices and submitting bids/responses • Links to other housing and support options e.g. social care packages • Proactive approach for targeting support on vulnerable and excluded households who are not responding to adverts

Local authorities and their partners should develop and test (prior to launch) each element of the scheme to ensure that it meets the needs of a wide range of vulnerable groups. User groups and their representatives are an invaluable way in which to validate policies and procedures. This process should also be adopted as part of monitoring and review. Adequate resources need to be made available to take action in response to any identified problems.

6.3 Policies, Procedures and Advice

In meeting the needs of vulnerable and excluded households, local authorities and their partners should adopt a twin-track approach:

- developing policies and procedures which ensure that vulnerable people in housing need receive appropriate priority under a CBL scheme (see paragraph 8.4); and
- providing advice and support.

The availability of advice and support for vulnerable and excluded groups is essential. The 1996 Act provides that any necessary assistance in making a housing application is available free of charge to people who are likely to have difficulty in doing so without assistance. This can, in part be provided through local authority housing advice services. The additional cost in providing such services can be offset through efficiency savings in back office functions with the adoption of CBL. These savings can be transferred into higher quality front line services. Another approach is to involve a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations to provide advice and support and act as advocates for groups and individual households. A number of CBL schemes have developed collaborative approaches with social services, health agencies and voluntary sector organisations:

- The Blackburn with Darwen scheme involved close working relationships between social services and each of the social housing landlords so that the care and support needs of vulnerable groups was addressed as part of total package including housing.
- Shelter were actively involved in the design and delivery of schemes in Croydon, Sheffield and Stockport so that the needs of, for instance, homeless people were addressed – this resulted in Croydon developing its ‘housing options information service (see chapter nine).
- Eastleigh Council and its RSL partners, although not a pilot, established a specialist panel consisting of health, social care and housing representatives, where advice can be sought as part of the individual support needs – referrals can be made by any agency or an individual applicant/carer.
- A number of schemes link CBL with disability housing registers (DHR) e.g. Bradford Homehunter. This scheme includes a number of key features:
 - property database that holds information on all accessible properties;
 - applicants seeking an accessible property are referred to the DPHS (who also manage the adaptations budget);
 - the DPHS provides advice and support and can make use of Homehunter resources e.g. multi-lingual advisers; and
 - accessible properties are not advertised but are let through a specific priority system separate from Homehunter.

In other schemes, such as Locata in West London, relevant properties and applicants with mobility needs are categorised by levels of accessibility offered and required. The lettings process is fully integrated with all properties being advertised through the single system.

There are advantages and disadvantages of both approaches. Fully integrated schemes may find it more of a challenge to provide the level of advice and support required by people with mobility needs. Schemes that have a different lettings process for specific groups and stock can result in a loss of transparency. But the key point is that both types of approaches should involve collaboration and close working relationships between a number of organisations.

In relation to future developments, in London, it has been proposed that the development of an accessible housing register should be part of a pan-London CBL¹⁹ (see also chapter nine).

6.4 Meeting the Challenges

Nevertheless, there are a number of challenges that need to be considered including:

- External organisations and agencies have to be convinced of the relevance and merits of CBL if they are actively to participate in its development and implementation. In the health and social care sector, there are fundamental changes underway in the planning and delivery of services. Local authorities and RSL should appreciate that other agencies may not necessarily regard CBL as a priority task. A process of consensus building with key agencies will be required. One way of progressing joint working is to initiate discussions with organisations that are already collaborating with local authority housing departments and RSLs such as ‘supporting people teams’.
- The quality of advice and support needs to be consistent across all organisations (statutory and voluntary agencies) so as to achieve equity for vulnerable and excluded groups. Many voluntary agencies have relatively high staff turnovers and sometimes make use of temporary staff and/or volunteers. It is, therefore, essential that regular training and information be provided especially when changes are made to policies and procedures.

CBL Schemes should be inclusive in that they focus on the needs of all vulnerable and excluded households. ‘Hidden’ groups because of, for example, their small numerical size should not be forgotten. Furthermore schemes must recognise that some households will have complex and multiple needs.

The clear message is that partnership working is important in the development and running of CBL schemes to provide advice and support for vulnerable groups (see chapter five).

¹⁹ Mayor of London (2004): *Accessible Living in London – A Feasibility Study for an Accessible Housing Register for London*: London, GLA.

CHAPTER 7

Planning For and Setting Up a Choice-Based Lettings Scheme

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to summarise and reiterate the key principles in developing CBL. For social housing organisations that are in the initial stages of designing a system, there are four steps in the process, which are outlined below. For organisations that already operate a CBL model, this framework can be modified for reviewing and enhancing existing schemes. Similarly for local authorities and their partners who are considering sub-regional approaches, these four steps can be utilised in conjunction with the principles discussed in chapter three.

There are already a number of guides and reports that set out the steps that need to be taken and issues to be considered in developing a CBL scheme. These are highlighted in appendix three.

7.2 Reviewing Existing Allocations Systems

The starting point is to carry out a robust assessment of the existing allocations systems. A ‘best value review’ approach should be adopted. It is important to take a broad perspective that:

- reviews allocations policies and procedures for all social housing landlords in a defined geographical area which are prospective partners in a CBL scheme; and
- links allocations and lettings to the current and future state of the social housing market.

Landlords are encouraged to make use of the Audit Commission’s publication on ‘key lines of enquiry on allocations’²⁰.

A comprehensive and robust assessment should involve four aspects and these are:

CURRENT POSITION ON ALLOCATIONS AND LETTINGS

There are a number of issues to explore including:

- applicant, staff and member perceptions;
- performance measures e.g. relet times and void levels;
- allocations outcomes i.e. ‘who gets what type and location of property?’;
- meeting the requirements of Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and the statutory Code of Guidance on the allocation of accommodation;

²⁰ Audit Commission (2004): *Allocations and Lettings – Key Lines of Enquiry*: London, Audit Commission.

- meeting other more general codes of practice such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing;
- partnership working, including the processes and outcomes of nomination agreements between local authorities and RSLs; and
- degree of choice that currently exists.

CHANGING NATURE OF THE HOUSING MARKET

This involves an assessment of the state of the housing market including:

- supply i.e. the number, types and location of social housing;
- patterns of changing demand at an aggregate and micro-scale i.e. what types of property and neighbourhoods are in high and low demand and why?; and
- changes in the owner occupied and private rented sectors – for example, what are the implications for demand for social housing if house prices are rising and to what extent does the private rented sector compete with the social rented sector?

ALLOCATIONS AND LOCAL HOUSING POLICIES

This involves analysing the aims and outcomes of the allocations and lettings policy in relationship to broader or related local housing policies such as:

- contributing to building sustainable communities through initiatives such as local lettings;
- connecting to policies aimed at preventing homelessness or reducing the use of temporary accommodation;
- linking to community cohesion strategies so as to avoid allocation policies that contribute to segregation; and
- tackling low demand by fast-tracking applicants who express an interest in particular property types and neighbourhoods where there is a ready supply of accommodation.

ALLOCATIONS AND LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (LSPs)

This takes a somewhat wider perspective and consists of analysing the role of allocations and lettings for the policies of the Community Plan and the Local Strategic Partnership. It might include the relationship between allocations and:

- a broader customer choice agenda (see chapter 2.6);
- the needs of the local economy and public services e.g. housing for key workers; and
- improving the quality of life for vulnerable and excluded groups (see chapter six).

7.3 Agreeing a Vision

It is essential that there is a long-term 'vision' for choice in lettings agreed by local stakeholders. The crucial question is 'why do we want to introduce choice?'. It might, for instance, be about:

- providing a fair, transparent and understandable system;
- developing an applicant centred approach that enables households to be proactive in addressing their own requirements;
- making better use of existing rented stock;
- improving efficiency in allocations and lettings;
- meeting the needs of vulnerable households;
- helping to create sustainable communities and community cohesion.

Other potential objectives might include improving working relationships between social housing providers, and building links with other corporate aims (e.g. the local e-government agenda). These, however, are not primary objectives or ends, but should be considered as means for helping to achieve other aims.

The majority of the pilots had multiple objectives and one of the issues that emerged was the need to reach a balance between potentially conflicting aims. For example, improving efficiency in allocations by reducing relet periods and cutting down on the proportion of voids may require policies and procedures that conflict with making the system customer-centred. A number of schemes such as Derby Homefinder, Home Connections in Central London and Medway Home Choice operate a weekly advertising cycle while other use a two-week cycle. The former helps to ensure that relet times are kept to a minimum. But it can lead to uncertainty from an applicant perspective as applicants will not have received feedback from previous cycles about responses to adverts. But even under a two-week cycle, feedback results may not be available as this depends on other issues such as tenant sign up procedures and how quickly landlords provide lettings outcomes to the centre. The effectiveness of the overall void management process is just as important as the advertising cycle.

These potential conflicts can be resolved by ranking or prioritising a limited number of aims and objectives. It should, of course, be remembered that the overriding principle of CBL is about 'putting the customer first', and that this should be borne in mind at every step in the development process.

7.4 Routemap

A map is needed to identify the routes for moving from the current position to the vision. It is, of course, dependant on local circumstances. As has previously been noted, a series of small scale changes (such as non-penalisation for applicants who refuse offers) might be implemented relatively quickly as part of a route to the later establishment of a CBL model. These should however be regarded as an interim short term measure. The routemap must indicate how local authorities and their partners will achieve a comprehensive system as set out in chapters three to six.

In determining the routemap, organisations need to have a degree of realism in relation to the resources available. Consideration will need to be given to a range of factors such as:

- Skills and the need to map future requirements with existing expertise. Developing and delivering CBL will require skills such as:
 - marketing;
 - advice and support;
 - project management; and
 - ICT.

Organisations may need to consider issues such as staff redeployment and retraining as well as recruiting staff with relevant expertise and the use of external consultants.

- Ability to build on existing policies such as a common housing register, housing advice and support services, and marketing strategies for low demand properties.
- Use of existing partnerships such as local authority and housing association liaison groups. Building links with other partners such as the health and social care sector and voluntary sector organisations is also essential. This will be a time consuming and resource intensive process where joint working does not yet exist.
- Opportunities to make use of related initiatives including corporate customer initiatives and e-government developments such as community portals and call centres.
- Proposed and possible developments in the national policy framework such as moveUK. Organisations should consider how their existing and proposed schemes might link into this initiative.

Overall, the development of a routemap ought to be part of a project management approach for developing and delivering CBL. Local authorities and their partners may wish to consider using PRINCE 2 (Projects in Controlled Environments)²¹, which is recommended by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC). The advantages of this specific method are that it requires organisations to clearly set out the business case for a project and this can subsequently be monitored and reviewed. PRINCE 2 is a complex and challenging method that requires the lead partner to have this form of project management embedded in the culture of the organisation.

7.5 Detailed Policies and Procedures

Detailed policies and procedures should reflect local circumstances. The types of decisions that need to be considered have been illustrated in chapter three. Although, it is useful to learn lessons from existing schemes, these may be based on different types of housing markets, and different priorities. Nevertheless, the following checklist highlights some of the important questions that will need to be discussed.

CBL Principle	Examples of Questions
Applicant initiative	How are you going to deal with applicants who make frequent unsuitable bids? How are you going to respond to applicants who continually refuse offers?
Social market information	What types of information are you going to provide and are you going to include material on the private rented sector and the bottom end of the owner occupation market? How are you going to ensure that applicants are aware of the changing pattern of supply and demand?
Property and neighbourhood information	How are you going to respond to requests from applicants for additional information? Are you going to advertise the specific address of the available property?
Vulnerable and excluded groups	How are you going to ensure that information about the scheme is in a suitable form and accessible for a wide range of vulnerable and excluded groups?
Labelling and selection criteria	Are adapted properties going to be reserved for disabled people? If so, this needs to be reflected in the LA's allocation scheme. Are you going to allow applicants to underbid i.e. respond to properties of a smaller size than they are entitled to?
Communications	How are you going to ensure that applicants receive information on adverts and feedback on a regular basis? How are you going to keep applicants informed about any changes to the CBL system?
Advice and support	Are you going to target additional advice and support on specific groups (e.g. homeless households or non-bidders) and if so why and how? Who is going to provide advice and support, and if a range of agencies are involved how are you going to ensure similar quality of service?

21 Office of Government Commerce (2002): *Business Benefits through Project Management*: London, TSO.

Designing the full CBL system requires the active involvement and participation of a wide range of local stakeholders. Having established a vision and a routemap, the detailed policies and processes have to be developed and tested by the partnership prior to launch.

Generally, the timeframe for setting up a comprehensive district-wide scheme is likely to take approximately 18 months from initiating a review of allocations and lettings through to the launch of a system.

CHAPTER 8

Key Issues in Operating a Choice-Based Lettings Scheme

8.1 Introduction

There are a number of interrelated key issues that have emerged from the evaluation of the pilots and from the advice service run by the Centre for Comparative Housing Research. In addition, there are some concerns that have emerged in the post-pilot period especially the relationship between CBL and community cohesion. Each of these will need to be carefully considered by social housing organisations involved in the development stage of designing a system as well as by those already running a scheme.

There are no straightforward or simple solutions to resolving some of these challenges. But considerable progress can be made through collaborative approaches with partners.

8.2 Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable and Excluded People (see chapter six)

CBL schemes which do not help vulnerable groups are unsatisfactory. The bidding guidance for the pilots in late 2000 highlighted that it would be necessary for schemes to develop innovative arrangements and procedures to enable vulnerable households to fully participate effectively and proactively in schemes. As already noted, the 1996 Act now makes it a requirement for housing authorities to ensure that assistance is made available (free of charge) to persons who are likely to have difficulty in doing so without support.

The importance of developing both appropriate policies and procedures and advice and support has been highlighted in chapter six.

8.3 Community Cohesion

Concerns have been raised on CBL by the House of Commons Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee Report on Social Cohesion²²

“The ODPM’s housing policy to promote choice-based lettings needs to be reviewed. Freedom of choice can lead to greater segregation if tenants’ choices are constrained by limited information, fear and safety.”

It, nevertheless, needs to be noted that there are a number of reports that implicitly contradict this conclusion and indicate how CBL can positively contribute to social and community inclusion and cohesion²³.

22 House of Commons: OPDM – Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee (2004): *Social Cohesion*: London, TSO.

23 See, for example, Fotheringham D and Perry J (2003): *Offering Communities Real Choice – Lettings and Community Cohesion*: Coventry, CIH.
Robinson D et al (2004): *How Housing Management Can Contribute to Community Cohesion*: Coventry, CIH.
Blackaby B (2004): *Community Cohesion and Housing*: Coventry, CIH.

More broadly, there is a continuing debate on housing choice and constraint regarding black and minority ethnic communities. The key issue is whether households live in particular neighbourhoods because of choice (e.g. family, extended social networks, and local facilities) or constraint (e.g. fear of racial harassment and lack of suitable housing).

So far, there have been no British research studies that have robustly investigated the outcomes of CBL in relation to black and minority ethnic households and geographical segregation. The CBL pilots were not operational long enough to produce conclusive evidence of the long-term effects of CBL on community cohesion. The ODPM has, therefore, commissioned a long-term study on the impact of CBLs by Heriot-Watt University. One of the key areas under investigation is the outcome for black and minority ethnic households.

The evaluation of the pilots found no suggestion that BME communities were disadvantaged by the CBL process simply by virtue of their background. However, the researchers recognised that, to the extent that members of BME communities are seeking a different profile of properties – particularly larger properties – from other applicants, their choice can be circumscribed.

There are a number of things that local authorities and their partners should bear in mind in developing CBL schemes, to ensure that BME communities are not excluded or disadvantaged, for example:

- black and minority ethnic communities should be involved in developing and testing out CBL systems: this is the way to ensure that BME households can trust the schemes as being fair and transparent;
- social housing market information: Information will be required on the likely availability and popularity of specific types of property such as large family houses for extended households;
- property and neighbourhood information: Location of relevant facilities and services such as places of worship;
- vulnerable groups: Processes and procedures should be put in place as part of a comprehensive approach for meeting the needs of excluded groups to help, for example, black and minority ethnic elders;
- communications: Information needs to be available in a range of appropriate languages for paper-based systems, voice/telephony services and websites;
- advice and support: The potential of local community organisations acting as advice and support agencies should be investigated; and
- although there is no conclusive evidence to support the Committee's view that there is a need for strategies to be put in place to mitigate or reverse the tendency for freedom of choice to lead to greater segregation, CBL systems should be robustly monitored on the outcomes of the lettings process.

A comprehensive approach as adopted by Bradford Homehunter can be successful. This pilot has seen a sevenfold increase in the number of black and minority ethnic households on the housing register, and a similar increase in lettings. Other schemes (e.g. Bolton and Sheffield) have seen similar outcomes where there has been an explicit policy to work with a wide range of local stakeholders on community cohesion strategies. The Bradford scheme involved a longer-term strategy to change the image of social housing, provide tenancy support for black and minority ethnic households who moved to predominantly white neighbourhoods, and a robust approach for tackling racial harassment. In order to further address these issues in relation to CBL, the ODPM has set up an advisory group on black and minority ethnic social housing whose remit focuses primarily on allocations and lettings.

8.4 Prioritisation, Selection and ‘Currency’

A revised Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation (the Code) was published in November 2002. Paragraph 5.10 of the Code sets out the Government’s view that there is sufficient flexibility within the allocation statutory framework to enable housing authorities to offer applicants a choice of accommodation while continuing to give reasonable preference to those with the most urgent housing need.

Local authorities should ensure that their detailed policies and procedures meet the requirements of the Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and the Code of Guidance on the allocation of accommodation. It needs to be borne in mind that a balance has to be achieved between a simple and straightforward system and one that takes account of housing needs (including cumulative needs).

A number of the CBL pilots amended their original scheme in 2003 to take account of the revised statutory framework and revised guidance. Several of those operating a banding system introduced extra bands to cope with the requirement to take account of cumulative preference. One pilot switched from a system based on waiting time with priority cards to a banding system – partly to recognise cumulative preference but also because it was felt that there were too many priority cards in the system. Harborough Home Search widened access to its time-limited priority card system.

Balancing need and choice, especially moving from principle to practice, has been identified as a challenging issue and there is no one single ‘best’ approach. But there are some important considerations to bear in mind:

- Prioritisation and selection must take account of the allocation legislation and statutory guidance and in particular the requirement to give ‘reasonable preference’ to applicants in the ‘reasonable preference category’. Readers are strongly recommended to study chapter five of the Code and may wish to seek their own legal advice to ensure that they are satisfied their system is robust.

‘Currency’ should be simple and easily understandable. Complex points and banding systems can be difficult to understand or frustrating for the applicant and other stakeholders. Although a number of pilots maintained ‘points’ systems, these have often been simplified. Priority card systems may also be confusing if over-complex systems are developed that involve different types of priority cards for different groups.

CBL schemes have addressed these issues in a variety of ways:

- The Homefinder Direct scheme in East Cornwall makes use of four bands: emergency, gold, silver and bronze which denote different levels of need. The emergency band involves making use of a time limited priority card that gives applicants with very urgent housing needs precedence. If an applicant does not make use of the priority card within the time period and suitable properties have been advertised, then the household may be placed in the gold band. If a household with an emergency card responds to a suitable advertisement, they will be the first to be offered the property. If there is more than one applicant for an advertised home, the person who has the highest priority band and has been on the Homefinder Housing Register the longest in that band will be selected.
- The Derby Homefinder scheme has adopted a system based on seven bands that are linked to points. Households who join the common housing register are assessed on the basis of needs and are awarded points related to their need band. Applicants can respond up to a maximum of six property advertisements per weekly cycle. The household with the most points will be offered the property.
- The Home Connections scheme in Central London involves five local authorities and a number of housing associations. It has adopted a points-based approach with properties being advertised with a minimum number of points required. Applicants are assessed on the basis of needs and awarded points. A number of the partners have simplified or are in the process of simplifying their points system which they recognise has become complex and confusing for the customer.

8.5 Efficiency

A long-standing concern with CBL has been whether it might lead to a loss of efficiency e.g. longer relet periods and higher void rates. The evidence shows that these concerns can be tackled through CBL and indeed a number of pilots achieved higher performance levels on these key performance indicators. The discipline imposed by the strict CBL advertising cycle was behind many improvements, as was better integration between these new schemes and wider allocations and housing management processes such as void management, property inspections and the tenancy offer stage.

More specific actions to achieve efficiency include:

- advertising properties once an existing tenant has notified the landlord that they are ending their tenancy rather than waiting for a property to become vacant.
- multiple viewing by, say, the top three-ranked households after the selection stage. The latter approach has been adopted by Camden as part of the Home Connections scheme. But this has the disadvantage that applicants may receive many visit offers even though they are not the top-ranked household.
- weekly rather than two-weekly advertising cycles can ensure that there are not delays in advertising available properties. Pilots such as Medway and Home Connections in Central London adopted this system. The potential disadvantage is that applicants are unlikely to know whether their previous bids have been successful – thus creating confusion as to whether to respond to adverts in the next cycle.

From an organisational perspective, local authorities and RSLs will need to weigh up the costs of advertising on a weekly cycle against the potential benefits of reduced void periods and quicker relet times.

Overall, there can be conflicts between efficiency drivers and objectives such as putting the customer first. Local authorities and their partners will need to reach a consensus on the balance between efficiency and other aims. They should also consider the potential of CBL (and especially the move to sub-regional and regional schemes) as contributing to the efficiency savings required by the Gershon Review. Back office savings can be used to improve front line services such as housing advice and support for CBL.

8.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that monitoring and evaluation is explicitly built into the system. Local authorities and their partners should carry out a baseline study of their existing allocation system before embarking on CBL (see chapter seven). The 'before' study should be followed by regular post-implementation monitoring. This will enable schemes to be evaluated against their aims and objectives such as customer choice and efficiency.

In addition, it is essential that systems are put in place so that data is collected and monitored on a regular basis to ensure that vulnerable households and/or particular groups are not being disadvantaged by CBL (see chapter six).

Overall, monitoring and evaluation is essential for demonstrating that systems conform to statutory and good practice requirements as well as demonstrating that they achieve the intended aims and objectives.

Involving applicants and tenants is an important part of the monitoring and evaluation process. Not only should customers be provided with information and feedback on how the system is working, they should also be able to provide an input into the review process.

A number of schemes have built in regular and robust monitoring and evaluation systems. For example:

- Home Connections measures performance against a series of critical success factors linked to the aims of the scheme. Evaluation includes analysis of the database to identify changing patterns of supply and demand, use of customer focus groups, and postal questionnaire surveys.
- Harborough Home Search carries out an annual customer survey as well as obtaining information from satisfaction surveys that are carried out within two months of a new tenancy. It has also commissioned specific research to investigate particular issues such as whether the scheme meets the needs of vulnerable groups and homeless households²⁴. Information on how the scheme is operating is provided in a quarterly newsletter to applicants, and there is an advisory group that includes tenants, which meets quarterly.

²⁴ See Brown T et al (2004): *Has It Worked? – An Evaluation of the First Three Years of Harborough Home Search*: Market Harborough, Harborough District Council.

The findings from these types of studies should contribute to the development of action plans to enhance CBL schemes.

8.7 Information Communications Technology (ICT) (see also chapter nine)

A major concern among many of the pilots during 2001– 2003 was the difficulty of obtaining appropriate front office (e.g. websites) and back office (e.g. managing responses and producing response lists for adverts) systems. This problem is now less evident as software providers have addressed this issue. Indeed, there are a wide range of innovative approaches that have been developed including:

- registration forms and mutual exchange online – Bolton ‘homes for you’ scheme;
- multi-lingual websites – The East London Letting Company and Home Connections in Central London;
- online property searches – Derby Homefinder;
- mapping systems to find available property – Homefinder Direct in East Cornwall; and
- home swap online – Bradford Homehunter.

Overall, many of the pilots have been pleasantly surprised by the extent and volume of internet usage. A number of schemes (e.g. Home Connections, East London Lettings Company and Locata) have had to provide additional software and hardware to cope with increasing demand.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that there are still challenges to be met. For example, the development of CBL systems that make extensive use of websites and the internet for advertising properties, receiving responses and providing feedback will disadvantage applicants and tenants who are unable to access or make use of this technology. Housing organisations will need to link into the broader agenda of social inclusion and ICT to tackle this issue.

There are a wide range of ‘off-the-shelf’ ICT solutions that can be purchased. But it is important to ensure that these meet local requirements.

A further emerging issue especially with the growing interest in sub-regional and regional CBL is the ability to exchange property and household data between different systems. MoveUK is also likely to require effective exchange of information. Some work on this issue was undertaken for the ODPM in 2002 on CBL and government inter-operability frameworks²⁵. This study found that there was considerable support from the pilots for the principles of the exchange of data as it was felt that there would be significant benefits for both customers and housing organisations in terms of tenant and applicant mobility. However, concerns were raised over the scale and extent of data collection. At a strategic level, it is important that links are established with local authority e-government teams and that CBL is included in the annual implementing electronic government (IEG) statements. There is a sound case for involving e-government staff as participants in the CBL partnerships.

²⁵ Brown T and Yates N (2003): *Choice-Based Lettings and Government Inter-Operability Frameworks*. Available on <http://www.choicemoves.org.uk>

CHAPTER 9

Future Directions

9.1 Introduction

There are a number of ways in which CBL can and is being developed:

- Sub-regional and regional systems.
- A housing options approach.
- Information communications technology (ICT).

9.2 Sub-Regional and Regional Choice-Based Lettings

The Government wants to see further progress on the development of sub-regional and regional choice-based lettings. There are a wide range of inter-related potential benefits including:

- enabling applicants living close to existing local authority boundaries to search for properties in adjoining areas;
- providing opportunities for applicants to consider the option of longer distance moves through a single CBL system;
- breaking down artificial local authority boundaries by developing schemes based on real housing markets;
- more effective use of the social rented stock where sub-regions include both high and low demand neighbourhoods;
- reflecting the requirements of regional and national housing associations who wish for operational purposes to move away from individual local authority area based schemes; and
- more efficient management of the allocations and lettings process through economies of scale in back office functions i.e. a single administrative system covering a number of local authority areas.

Information from the Bolton 'homesforyou' service highlights the relevance of this type of approach for customers. Nearly 20% of applicants on the common housing register are from outside the local authority area and over 10% of lettings in the last quarter are to this group. This indicates a strong demand for greater links to other regional and national service providers.

There are significant challenges in moving towards regional and sub-regional systems such as:

- Deciding on the approach to sub-regional and regional CBL – for example, it might be based on a single back office administrative system but with each local authority area operating its own policies, or it could be a single front office system with applicants able to respond to adverts throughout the area. Whichever approach is taken, local authorities are reminded that they must comply with Part 6 of the 1996 when participating in regional and sub-regional CBL schemes with other local authorities and RSLs. For example, they must continue to have a published allocation scheme and to allocate accommodation in accordance with it.
- Defining sub-regional and regional housing markets.
- Building up partnerships between groups of local authorities, RSLs and other key stakeholders.
- Overcoming the concerns of key stakeholders as to whether their needs and requirements will be marginalized e.g. some local authorities may fear that it will not be possible to meet local needs.

A number of the pilots have made progress including:

- Homefinder Direct in East Cornwall: This scheme covers the three districts of Restormel, Caradon and North Cornwall and operates a single front and back office system. The use of an open register actively encourages cross boundary movement, but partners retain the ability to apply local letting conditions where necessary to protect the social fabric of small rural communities.
- Home Connections in Central London: This scheme covers five local authorities and involves a single back office system but with different policies and procedures in each area.
- Locata in West London: This involves a partnership of five local authorities and three housing associations. As well as a common back office administrative system, a quota of advertisements are available to applicants throughout the sub-region.
- East London Lettings Company pilot: This covers three local authority areas – Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest. A scheme enabling applicants to apply from properties across the sub-region started in 2004. There is also a common back office system.

A number of other CBL schemes are investigating the possibility of cross-boundary schemes. For example, Harborough Home Search may be extended on an incremental basis to other local authority areas within the Welland Partnership sub-region i.e. East Northamptonshire, Melton, Rutland and South Kesteven.

In some cases, sub-regional schemes involve shared back office functions but with each local authority and its partners operating their own specific policies and procedures. This can be a useful starting point but the goal should be the development of systems that enable applicants to search for properties on a wider geographical basis that more closely relates to housing and labour markets. The first step might be to have a 'set quota' of properties per advert cycle that are available to applicants throughout the sub-region.

Sub-regional and regional approaches also link into broader debates about regional governance, the establishment of sub-regional strategic partnerships (by regional development agencies) and sub-regions through regional housing and planning boards. There is thus a strong contextual case for exploring the possibilities of this type of CBL approach.

Some progress is already being made on regional systems. Discussions have been taking place during 2004 on a London-wide CBL system. The Draft London Housing Strategy (published in November 2004) identifies that the Housing Board 'will work towards a pan-London choice-based lettings scheme' and that this will link to a number of related initiatives including:

- common housing registers;
- out-of-London mobility schemes (HOMES, LAWN and moveUK); and
- pan-London accessible housing register (see chapter six).

It is argued that a comprehensive scheme will achieve a wide range of objectives including greater customer and staff satisfaction, contributing to more sustainable communities, tackling homelessness, reducing under-occupation and overcrowding and better matching supply of and demand for affordable housing.

Both the Government and the Housing Corporation welcome this initiative.

9.3 Housing Options

A number of local authorities and their partners particularly in generally high or mixed demand areas have progressed work on a housing options approach. The underlying principle is that applicants can make more informed decisions if they are provided with a wider range of options for tackling their housing needs. Croydon's scheme, 'Housing Options Information Service' promotes a wide range of services to applicants and tenants including:

- 'Fresh start' involving opportunities for moving to other areas of the country;
- 'Home exchange' through a mutual exchange network;
- private rentals;

- low cost home ownership;
- ‘Remaining in your own home’ through home improvement agency and staying put schemes.

Harborough Home Search produces a regular series of information briefings for applicants and tenants in a paper-based format and on their website. It includes shared ownership properties, mutual exchange schemes, and tenancy support services.

In many cases, housing options services are closely aligned with property shops as well as with housing advice centres. For example, ‘First Choice Properties’ in Sandwell is linked to a series of ‘letting shops’ in each of the six towns in the borough. The Sheffield Property Shop scheme involves a number of initiatives such as:

- ‘Coming soon properties’ i.e. accommodation that will be advertised to let in future weeks;
- ‘First come first served properties’ i.e. properties that are immediately available regardless of an applicant’s waiting time or band;
- ‘Sheffield responsible landlord scheme’;
- ‘Accreditation scheme for student housing’; and
- ‘Affordable housing for sale’ including homesteading and shared ownership.

Overall, a housing options approach is likely to involve:

- promoting a wider range of initiatives to meet homeseeker requirements in high demand areas (e.g. shared ownership, low cost owner occupation and mutual exchange schemes);
- property and/or housing advice shops;
- making more and better information available about other related housing services e.g. disabled facilities grants, care and repair/staying put initiatives and adaptation services; and
- marketing properties and neighbourhoods in low demand areas including targeting new groups of potential customers.

9.4 Information Communications Technology

There has been considerable progress in the last few years in making greater use of ICT in delivering CBL in innovative ways. The previous chapters have highlighted some of these initiatives.

There are a number of factors to consider in progressing the ICT element of CBL and these include:

- Building links with the local e-government agenda: There is a commitment that public services should be available electronically by the end of 2005. The next step is to ensure that 'e-services' are those that are wanted by the customer i.e. information, advice and support, and carrying out lettings transactions online (e.g. registration and tenancy sign-up). A number of pilots have already made considerable progress with Bolton enabling online registration, and Derby Homefinder with its online property search.

Progress needs to be made by local authorities and their partners who are involved with CBL in linking with a number of e-government projects such as:

- building on the national e-government projects such as customer relationship management (CRM), digital TV (see below), 'take-up and marketing', and local authority websites²⁶;
- E-innovations programme funded by the ODPM that includes themes on 'bridging the digital divide', 'efficiency' and new and emergent technology²⁷; and
- local authority annual implementing electronic government (IEG) statements.

The London Borough of Camden, for instance, is utilising the e-innovation programme to test 'virtual viewing' of the inside and outside of properties as part of the Home Connections scheme.

- Digital TV: Local authorities and their partners will need to consider the possibilities that are opened up with digital TV especially as analogue systems will be run down over the next decade. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport, for example, is consulting with local authorities and RSLs on the implications of this changeover for communal systems. The potential of digital TV for the provision of information and transactional activities will have possibilities for overcoming the digital divide. The Bolton 'homesforyou' service has piloted the use of digital TV as a way of accessing services and bidding for properties. Early indications are that it is popular and widely used.
- Digital divide: It is generally estimated that between 10-20% of tenants in the social rented sector have access to the internet at home. This figure is gradually increasing and the potential for a major improvement may come with developments in the use of digital TV. Even so, it is essential that local authorities and their partners who have invested or are investing in high specification front office systems such as interactive websites, consider how they might contribute to tackling social exclusion. A particularly important issue is the availability and accessibility of broadband, as downloading certain types of files such as maps and photographs require this type of system. Initiatives might include:

²⁶ See <http://www.localgovnp.org/>

²⁷ See <http://www.localgov.gov.uk/page.cfm?pageID=668&Language=eng>

- partnership working with Learn Direct Centres and Library Services over the availability of CBL online along with training and support for users;
 - collaboration with broadband forums and providers over access and cost issues;
 - providing internet access points in housing advice centres (e.g. Home Connections in Central London) and property shops (e.g. Sheffield Property Shop); and
 - setting up kiosks in public locations (e.g. Brighton and Hove).
- Empowering vulnerable households: There are opportunities to make the connections with ICT initiatives for improving the quality of life for vulnerable households. The Audit Commission has highlighted the relevance of telecare for promoting independence and well-being for users²⁸, while the Department for Work and Pensions has initiated a scheme to deliver better services for older people by joined up back office systems.

Harborough Home Search, for example, developed links with the Leicestershire Careonline project. The latter was set up to explore how the internet can be used to improve the quality of life for vulnerable people by joining up health, social care and housing services.

- New Technology: There are, of course, likely to be significant innovations over the next few years – many of which are already being developed. Interrelated possibilities include virtual property shops, online advice and support services operating in real time using customer relationship management software, and 24 x 7 call centres using latest developments in telephony.

28 Audit Commission (2004): *Implementing Telecare*: London, Audit Commission.

APPENDIX 1

Choice-Based Lettings Pilots Websites: December 2004

Lead Authority	Pilot Name	Website address	Example of:
Bath and NE Somerset	Homeseekers	http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/BathNES/socialandhousing/services/housingregister/advice/housingregister/default.htm	Common Housing Register http://www.somer.org.uk/trust/default.asp
Blackburn with Darwen	B-with-us	http://www.b-with-us.com	Area information http://www.b-with-us.com/area_information_details.asp?ID=35
Bolton	homesforyou	http://www.homesforyou.org.uk	On-line registration form http://www.b-with-us.com/area_information.asp
Bradford	Homehunter	http://www.bradfordhomehunter.co.uk	On-line home swap http://www.bradfordhomehunter.co.uk
Brighton and Hove	HomeWire	http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/site01.cfm?request=c1000781	Kiosks http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/site01.cfm?request=c1000781
Camden	Home Connections	http://www.homeconnections.org.uk	Multi-lingual website (e.g. via Barnet) http://www.homeconnections.org.uk/public/xml/lang.asp?GUID=4CD93D4B035B49CBBF6495A0DB4133AC&PAGE=6613132
Coventry	Coventry HomeChoice	http://www.coventryhomechoice.com	Small partnership https://vault2.secured-url.com/sslroot/site/hcworks.asp
Croydon	Croydon Housing Options Information Service	http://www.croydon.gov.uk/choice	Housing options http://195.188.147.12/myOptions.asp?ID=2A5A041A2DE049F3B2D7C2D81A28B10D
Derby	Derby Homefinder	http://www.derbyhomefinder.org	On-line property search http://www.derbyhomefinder.org
Ealing	Locata	http://www.locata.org	Cross boundary http://www.locata.org/Public/home.asp
Eastbourne	HomeChoice	http://www.eastbourne-homechoice.co.uk	4 bands of need http://www.eastbourne-homechoice.co.uk/apply.asp
Hammersmith & Fulham	Getting London Moving	http://www.getting-london-moving.com	Unsuccessful scheme http://www.getting-london-moving.com

Lead Authority	Pilot Name	Website address	Example of:
Harborough	Harborough Home Search	http://www.harborough-home-search.com	Housing information – advice & support http://www.harborough-home-search.com
Haringey	Haringey Homesearch	http://www.homesearch.haringey.gov.uk	Fast lets http://www.homesearch.haringey.gov.uk/fastletsintro.asp?ID=0CF5A1958C304C238BEE4EAC3B7138CB
Herefordshire	Home Point Herefordshire	http://www.home-point.info	Property results http://www.home-point.info
Kennet	Homes @ Kennet	http://www.homesatkennet.co.uk	Housing partnership http://www.homesatkennet.co.uk/scripts/choice.wsc/aboutkennet.html
Lewisham	Lewisham Homesearch	http://www.lewishamhomesearch.org.uk	Limited property types http://www.lewishamhomesearch.org.uk
Manchester	Homefinder	http://www.manchesterhomefinder.org.uk	Priority homes http://www.manchesterhomefinder.org/h2choome.shtm
Mansfield	Moveahead	http://www.moveahead.ms	Date order http://www.moveahead.ms
Medway	Medway Home Choice	http://www.medwayhomechoice.co.uk/	Weekly advertising http://www.medwayhomechoice.co.uk/aboutus.asp
New Forest	New Forest HomeSearch	http://www.nfdc.gov.uk/homesearch	Shared ownership properties http://www.nfdc.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1883&articleaction=currentshare&CFID=12108&CFTOKEN=13390983
Newham	East London Lettings Company	http://www.ellchoicehomes.org.uk	Language & sign assistance http://www.ellchoicehomes.org.uk
Restormel	Homefinder Direct	http://www.homefinderdirect.org.uk	Use of maps to find homes http://www.homefinderdirect.org.uk/w-cornwall.htm
Sandwell	First Choice Properties	http://www.firstchoiceproperties.org.uk	Property Shop http://www.firstchoiceproperties.org.uk/shoplocation.htm
Sheffield	Sheffield Property Shop	http://www.sheffieldpropertyshop.org.uk	Furnished accommodation www.sheffieldhomes.org.uk/finding-a-new-home/furnished-accomodation
Stockport	Homechoice	http://www.stockport.gov.uk/homechoice	Points http://www.stockport.gov.uk/content/housing/counciltenants/homechoice/howhomechoiceworks?a=5441
Sunderland		http://www.sunderlandhousinggroup.co.uk/cbl	Stock transfer http://www.sunderlandhousinggroup.co.uk/cbl/aboutus.asp

APPENDIX 2

Local Authorities Operating CBL Systems 2003

This list identifies local authorities that self-assessed themselves as operating CBL systems in 2003.

It should be noted that this does not necessarily imply that these local authorities meet the guidance set out in chapters three – six.

North East

Newcastle upon Tyne
Sunderland

Yorkshire and Humberside

Barnsley
Bradford
Leeds
North East Lincolnshire
Sheffield

East Midlands

Amber Valley
Bassetlaw
Boston
Derby
Harborough
Lincoln
Mansfield

East of England

Basildon
Dacorum
Great Yarmouth
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
Peterborough
South Cambridgeshire
Stevenage

London

Barnet
Brent

Camden

Croydon

Ealing

Haringey

Harrow

Hillingdon

Hounslow

Islington

Kensington and Chelsea

Lewisham

Newham

Redbridge

Sutton

Tower Hamlets

Waltham Forest

Westminster

South East

Ashford

Crawley

Eastbourne

Eastleigh

New Forest

Rushmoor

The Medway Towns

South West

Bath and North East

Somerset

Caradon

Carrick

Kennet

North Cornwall

North Wiltshire

Poole

Restormel

West Midlands

Coventry

Herefordshire

Rugby

Sandwell

Stoke-on-Trent

Wolverhampton

Wychavon

North West

Blackburn with Darwen

Blackpool

Bolton

Bury

Fylde

Liverpool

Manchester

Oldham

Preston

Rochdale

Sefton

Stockport

Tameside

Trafford

Warrington

Wigan

Wirral

Wyre

APPENDIX 3

Resources on Choice-Based Lettings

Principles and Overviews on Choice-Based Lettings

Brown, T., Hunt, R. & Yates, N. (2000): *Lettings – A Question of Choice*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Chicemoves Website: <http://www.chicemoves.org.uk>

Cowan, D. and Marsh, A. (2004): *From Need to Choice – R (A) v Lambeth LBC, R (Lindsay) v Lambeth LBC*: Modern Law Review Vol 67 No 3, pp 478-507.

DETR & DSS (2000): *Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All*: London, DETR, Chapter 9.

Housing Corporation (2001): *The big Picture – Choice in Lettings*: London, Housing Corporation.

ODPM (2002): *'How to Choose Choice' – Lessons from the first year of the ODPM's CBLs Pilot Schemes*: London, ODPM.

ODPM (2002): *Revision of the Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Accommodation*: London, ODPM, especially paragraph 5.3.

ODPM (2004): *Piloting Choice-Based Lettings – An Evaluation*: London, ODPM.

Pawson, H. (2002): *Allocations and Choice in Scotland*: Edinburgh, Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland.

Case Studies on Choice-Based Lettings

Brown, T., Dearling, A., Hunt, R., Richardson, J. and Yates, N. (2002): *Allocate or Let? – Your Choice*: Coventry and York, Chartered Institute of Housing and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Brown, T., Hunt, R. and Richardson, J. (2004): *Has it Worked? – An Evaluation of the First Three Years of Harborough Home Search*: Market Harborough, Harborough District Council.

Brown, T., Hunt, R., Line, B. and Middleton, C. (2001): *HomeChoice: choice based lettings in practice*: Birmingham, People for Action.

Overview on Allocations

Audit Commission (2004): *Allocations and Lettings – Key Lines of Enquiry*: London, Audit Commission.

Pawson, H. et al. (2000): *Local Authority Policy and Practice on Allocations, Transfers and Homelessness*: London, DETR.

Shelter (2001): *The Lettings Lottery: the range and impact of homelessness and lettings policies*: London, Shelter.

Community Lettings

Chartered Institute of Housing (2001): *Good Practice Briefing Note No 20 – Sustainable Lettings*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Cole, I., Iqbal, B., Slocombe, L. & Trott, T. (2001): *Social Engineering or Consumer Choice – Rethinking Housing Allocations*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Cope, H. (2000): *Flexible Allocations and Local Lettings Schemes*: London, National Housing Federation.

Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and Allocations

Blackaby, B. (2004): *Community Cohesion and Housing – A Good Practice Guide*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Chartered Institute of Housing (2003): *Offering Communities Real Choices – Lettings and Community Cohesion*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee (2004): *Social Cohesion*: London, HMSO, Vol One.

Ratcliffe, P. with Tomlins, R. et al (2001): *Breaking Down the Barriers – Improving Asian Access to Social Rented Housing*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Robinson, D. et al. (2004): *How Housing Management Can Contribute to Community Cohesion*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Vulnerable Groups

Chartered Institute of Housing (2004): *Good Practice Briefing 29 – Health and Housing*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Hammond, J. and Whittles, S. (2001): *Adapting Thinking – Options Offered Through a Disabled Persons Housing Service*: Coalville, Leicestershire DPHS.

Mayor of London (2004): *Accessible Living in London – A Feasibility Study for an Accessible Housing Register for London*: London, GLA.

Common Registers

Binns, J. & Cannon, L. (1996): *Common Housing Registers*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Scottish Executive (2004): *CHR Guide – Building a Common Housing Register*: Edinburgh, Scottish Executive.

Mutual Exchange

Jones, M. and Sinclair, F. (2002): *Doing it for Themselves – Mutual Exchanges and Tenant Mobility*: York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Managing Change

Audit Commission (2001): *Change Here! Managing Change to Improve Local Services*: London, Audit Commission.

Holder, A., McQuillan, W., Williams, P. & Fitzgeorge-Butler, A. (1998): *Surviving or Thriving? Managing Change in Housing Organisations*: Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Project Management

Office of Government Commerce (2002): *Business Benefits through Project Management*: London, TSO.

Information Communications Technology (ICT)

Audit Commission (2004): *Implementing Telecare*: London, Audit Commission.

Brown, T. and Yates, N. (2003): *Choice-Based Lettings and Government Inter-Operability Frameworks*. Available on <http://www.choicemoves.org.uk>

Choice and Public Services

Audit Commission (2004): *Choice in Public Services*: London, Audit Commission.

Corry, D. (Ed) (2004): 'Choice Cuts' – *Essays on the Improvement of Local Public Services*: London, New Local Government Network.

House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (2004): *Choice, Voice and Public Services – Written Evidence*: London, The Stationery Office.

Lent, A. and Arend, N. (2004): *Making Choices – How Can Choice Improve Local Public Services?*: London, New Local Government Network.

Local Government Association (2004): *Enabling Choice*: London, LGA.