

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting15th March 2007

1. Title of Item/Report

The Development of Choice Based Lettings - Report of Housing and Community Safety Select Committee

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report that had been produced by the Council's Housing and Community Safety Select Committee and related to Choice based lettings and how Stockton Borough could respond to the national agenda.

It was explained that Choice-based lettings (CBL) was a new method of allocating social housing. CBL schemes gave people more choice in where they wanted to live by allowing people to apply (or 'bid') for advertised social housing vacancies. Applicants were allowed to see the full range of available properties and could apply for any to which they were suitably matched. Housing authorities were still required to ensure that reasonable preference was extended to certain categories of applicants, for instance those who were homeless or who had medical need. CBL schemes generally provided for this by placing applicants into priority 'bands'.

The Housing and Community Safety Select Committee examined the subject over a 6-month period in order to determine how Stockton Borough Council should respond to the national agenda.

It was a Government target for all local authorities to operate CBL schemes by 2010, and for those schemes to include housing associations and the private rented sector. The Government also wished to see CBL schemes developing at the sub-regional and regional level.

The Committee concluded that choice-based lettings had advantages over the current method of allocating social housing in Stockton Borough and had the potential to deliver real benefits to residents; it represented a shift towards a

much more customer focussed approach.

Cabinet noted that during the course of the review, it became clear that due to the timescales of the Tees Valley sub-regional project, Stockton Borough Council's Cabinet would be required to make a decision in March 2007 on whether to give approval for Stockton's commitment to membership of the sub-regional scheme. The Committee recognised the additional benefits likely to be achieved through membership of a Tees Valley sub-regional scheme in terms of customer choice and economies of scale, and conclude that Stockton should give full commitment to the project.

The Committee noted the significant differences between existing, points-based method of allocation and choice based lettings; and that a comprehensive consultation process would need to be made in order to prepare both customers and staff for the introduction of choice based lettings.

Cabinet commended the report and fully supported the recommendations of the Select Committee.

RESOLVED that

1. in principle Stockton Council adopts a Choice Based Lettings scheme for allocating its property.
2. the Stockton Choice Based Lettings scheme be developed further in the context of the Tees Valley Sub-regional scheme; and that the necessary IT system be procured through the appropriate joint tendering exercise.
3. the sub-regional scheme be developed on the basis of a common overarching policy and the development of a Common Housing Register; and that the common policy be developed to reflect the features as set out in Appendix 1.
4. a detailed feasibility study be undertaken by Tristar Homes on the preferred option of a one-stop shop approach to deliver choice based lettings in Stockton Borough, taking full account of necessary expenditure, the qualitative and quantitative cost-benefits that would accrue, and with due regard to existing and proposed Council service provision; and that this be examined by the Committee at its first meeting of municipal year 2007-08.
5. the Suspensions Policy in relation to the Choice Based Lettings scheme be based on the approach adopted by Erimus Housing, as set

out in Appendix 2.

6. other Housing providers in the Borough and sub-region be encouraged to participate in the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

7. the possibility of introducing a sub-regional Disabled Persons' Housing Service be further investigated by the Tees Valley CBL partnership.

8. a comprehensive consultation process was undertaken by Tristar Homes in order to provide both customers and staff with an understanding of the new scheme and to ensure ease of access for all once implemented.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The topic was identified as an area meriting a scrutiny review because of the need for Stockton to respond to the national agenda for choice based lettings.

The Committee developed the following objectives for the review:

- to examine the opportunities offered by choice based lettings
- to assist with development of a choice based policy for the Borough
- to examine the possibilities with regard to developing a sub-regional scheme

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillors Leonard and Nelson declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in this item as they were Members of the Tristar Management Board.

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable.

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday 23rd March 2007

Proper Officer
19 March 2007