

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO CABINET

1. Meeting:	The Cabinet
2. Date:	22 <sup>nd</sup> June, 2011
3. Title:	Improving the administration of Choice Based Lettings and the Housing Register
4. Programme Area:	Neighbourhood and Adults Services

### 5. Summary

Choice based lettings (CBL) have been in operation in Rotherham since June 2005, since then there have been a number of improvements.

Recently it has been identified that further changes to the administration of CBL and the Housing Register are required in order to reduce the number of refusals of accommodation. Failure to address this will have significant impact on both void relet times and the perception of the CBL letting service.

This report details how we can make those improvements to achieve a reduction in the refusal rates, reduce unproductive work and minimise the length of time homes are left empty. As some of the recommendations represent a change to the current Housing Allocation Policy, The Cabinet are required to agree the policy changes.

### 6. Recommendations

**That Cabinet:**

1. **AGREE THE HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY DETAILED BELOW TO TAKE EFFECT FROM 1<sup>st</sup> JULY 2011.**
  - **RESERVE THE RIGHT NOT TO OFFER A PROPERTY**
  - **INCLUDE A SHORT TERM SUSPENSION OF APPLICATION FOLLOWING 2 REFUSALS IN BOTH THE PRIORITY AND GENERAL GROUPS.**
2. **AGREE THE CHANGES TO THE VOID AND LETTING PROCESSES DETAILED IN SECTIONS 7.2 AND 7.11 OF THE REPORT TO TAKE EFFECT FROM 1<sup>st</sup> JULY 2011**

## **7. Proposals and details**

**7.1** “Key Choices” is a choice based lettings system (CBL) in which customers access social rented housing and the Allocation Policy sets out the way (the rules) in which we let these properties. The effectiveness of “Key Choices” is dependant on its simplicity where customers understand the process, it has added value as it is customer led though self empowerment and has transparency by advertising what properties are available.

Since the start of the CBL scheme in June 2005 there has been a reduction in refusal rates from 42% refusals in 2008 to 29% in 2010. However it has recently become apparent that the refusal rates have now started to increase with the current reported refusal to let ratio at 1 to 2.79. (35.8% of properties refused). Appendix 1 details the number of refusals and reasons between 5/9/10 to 29/2/11.

This report instigated a customer journey mapping exercise. This has involved the Service Improvement team speaking to staff and visiting customers to gain an understanding of their experience in the whole of the letting process.

The results are captured in this report and will inform service improvements and identify better working practices involved in lettings. The review, which is now complete, has included assessing the customers experience starting from the outgoing tenant when they terminate, their experience at the pre-termination inspection, how customers access information on the property adverts, bidding, how and when the application was verification, the viewing, the offer, satisfaction of void repairs and sign up arrangements.

The Service Improvement Officer also contacted customers who have refused properties to gain an understanding to the reasons why. These customers have advised that they refused the property due to the standard of repairs.

### **New Tenants Views**

#### **Findings**

14 new tenants were contacted who have very recently taken on new tenancies and the Service quality team gathered their views on their experience:

- 29% (4) waited over 1 month to be told their bid had been successful.
- 21% (3) waited over 3 months to be told their bid had been successful.
- People new to an area stated that more information on the surrounding area would have been very useful.
- 79% (11) of the new tenants spoken to still have repairs outstanding.
- 100% of new tenants were happy with their new home.
- 100% of customers said they were happy with the service they had received from Key Choices.

- 64% (9) were happy with the service they had received from 2010 Rotherham.
- New tenants can be waiting up to two weeks for a un-cap and test of their gas supply, this delays moving in.
- New tenants are not offered help with sourcing their gas and electric suppliers if they need it.

One customer who accepted a property in December 2010 had actually been short-listed in September but was not contacted until 23<sup>rd</sup> December. As 4 months had elapsed she had forgot that she had made a request but then felt rushed into signing up for the property on Christmas Eve, also no safety checks could be made until the new year and grills were left on the property.

In addition to more information being made available about the local area, some of the advert information was incorrect. Example: One property was advertised as a parlour house, but the separating wall had been knocked down so it was therefore unsuitable for the medical needs of the applicant. This is a result of untrained staff carrying out inspections. This means that some applicants may be missing out on properties, or are wasting their bids.

There are recommendations for CBL in Section 7.11; there are also recommendations regarding the void process (in Section 7.2) that have been identified as part of the end to end review.

## **7.2 To summarise the recommendations regarding the voids process identified by the end to end review are:**

### **Pre-termination inspection**

- The void process from beginning to end should be carried out by one team, this would ensure a seamless service and only at the point of sign up should the Neighbourhood Champion be involved. One team would offer a consistent approach to all aspects of the service and ensure the customer gets the same standard of service across the borough.
- That Key Choices carry out the role of a voids team.
- Neighbourhood Champion should not carry out pre-term inspections of properties; this should be carried out by a qualified Technical Officer.
- Technical officers need to be part of the void team and work closely with contractors to keep void turnaround times as short as possible.
- Contractors should attend pre-terms so that identified works can be planned for, this would reduce void time.
- Voids team should have a point of contact at the Contractors so weekly updates on void properties can be given, this could be an email with an estimated timescale for the return of keys.
- Contractors should be made aware if a property needs clearing and then order this work with the Caretaking Teams. This should, in most cases, not delay repair work being started (only in the case of filthy, verminous or needles at the property).
- Clear instructions should be given to outgoing tenants on handing in keys; the process needs to be revised.

## **Viewing the Empty Property**

- Ensure photo identification is requested and supplied by all new applicants on viewings and sign up. This could be stipulated when organising the viewing of the property with the tenant.
- Properties should be viewed by the voids team before taking tenants on a viewing and checks made to ensure the property meets the House Proud Standard.
- When furnished homes are to be fitted, ensure the tenant is capable of purchasing and carrying out the painting.
- Guidelines on decorating vouchers need to be reviewed and adhered to across the borough. (Decorating Packs are being considered as an alternative to vouchers. This will give a standard approach and customers will be given a choices of colours of paints which will be delivered directly to the customers within 48 hours)
- Evaluate the reason properties are being refused, getting the viewers to complete an evaluation form during the viewing and addressing constant negative comments. Providing more information in the offset could also reduce refusal rates.

## **Issues identified by the new tenants**

- Ensure that furnished homes tenants have the means and are capable to carry out painting before furniture is delivered.
- Improve the turnaround time on gas testing. This is often taking up to 2 weeks after sign up.
- More contact with the tenant within the first 14 days to check that any unidentified repairs are reported and completed. This should be carried out by the Neighbourhood Champion.
- Neighbourhood Champions spend more time offering vulnerable tenants support during the first six months of their tenancy, this would be possible if they no longer were responsible for the void lettings process.
- Consider producing more localised information to go into sign up packs, or produce information packs on each area that could be displayed in the Property Shop or in local Neighbourhood Offices.

## **7.3 Examples of Good Practice for CBL in other authorities**

As part of the evidence gathering House Mark and a number of local authorities have been contacted to identify “Good Practice” in relation to their CBL processes. The results from those who have replied are:

### **Berneslai Homes**

**Response:** We ‘penalise priority applicants who refuse a reasonable offer of accommodation without good reason by reducing the level of priority. We have also recently introduced a ‘penalty’ for serial refuses in the lowest band. We have a number of people who apply each week then once offered they do

not go to accompanied view and just refuse the property. For those people if they **refuse 5 offers** without good reason the application is **suspended for 6 months**. We don't allow cooling off periods.

We allow 3 bids per week and aim to advertise the properties and make initial offers of vacancies during the notice period to reduce relet times.

## **Wakefield**

**Response** - Wakefield doesn't impose penalties but they stop applicants bidding once they have been made an offer. Their target acceptance rate is only 70%.

The offer and viewing is made the week after the advert cycle closes. The applicant is allowed 3 bids per week. If they come top for all 3 properties the applicant is offered the properties in order of preference.

In order to reduce refusals Wakefield provide information about the local area on each property advert via "Google street view"

## **Bassetlaw District Council**

### **Response**

Applicants in non-priority bands who have **refused 3 offers** of suitable accommodation, having 'bid' for the property and refused the property without good reason or for a reason where the details were clearly displayed in the property advert, **will have their application suspended for 6 months** where they will not be allowed to place any 'bids' for advertised properties.

Applicants will only be made one offer of a property at a time. Once an applicant has been made an offer they will not be able to bid or be considered for other offers of accommodation until the current offer is refused. The successful bidder will normally be contacted within 48 hours of the close of bids. If A1 Housing is unable to contact the successful bidder within 48 hours this could result in the bid being withdrawn and the property being offered to the next suitable bidder. Applicants are expected to decide whether to accept or refuse the offer at the time of viewing the property.

A1 Housing reserve the right not to offer a property requested by the applicant where it is not considered in the best interest of the applicant, the community or A1 Housing.

## **7.4 How CBL works in Rotherham**

Our CBL system is comparable with other CBL systems in the country, and its relatively early implementation meant that it was used as a model of good practice by other Local Authorities. Customer satisfaction levels with the CBL service have always been high.

Customers are limited to 3 bids per week, customers in the priority group can refuse 2 offers; after which their application category reverts back to the General Group. There are no consequences for customers in the General Group who refuse properties. This is in line with Government Code of Guidance in Allocations that suggests that Housing authorities should not, as a matter of course, impose penalties on applicants who refuse an offer of accommodation which they have applied for under a choice based lettings scheme.

Applicants aren't offered the property until it is ready to let, so the applicant continues to bid weekly until an offer is made. There is information about the local area on the property advert and "Google street view" is available on a TV screen in the Property Shop. The Key choices team are currently in liaison with RBT to add "Google street view" to the property adverts on the website.

A new ICT system called Abrisas will go live in September 2011, this system will reduce refusal rates by offering "real time queue position" and the system will only allow applicants to make 3 requests per week for properties that they are eligible for.

**7.4.1** A detailed analysis of Rotherham's CBL processes has found that there are some working practices that impact on refusal rates which in turn creates unproductive work. These are:

#### **There is a Lack of Feedback**

- There is currently no individual feedback given on whether or not the applicant has been successful in their previous bids. The Allocation Policy states that if applicants have not been contacted within 10 working days they must assume that they are not successful. Weekly letting results are published and displayed on the internet in local offices and in the property Shop. Customers can identify properties they have bid for and then compare the date and group of the successful applicant for properties. The letting results give the customer an approximate guide to waiting times and demand for properties in their area of choice.

#### **Offers are not made until the property is ready to let**

- The current letting process is that applicants are not contacted to make an offer until the property is ready to let, this can be months after the close of bidding. An example is a flat in Parkgate which was advertised on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2010, the successful applicant wasn't contacted until the property was ready to let and the offer wasn't made until 21<sup>st</sup> January 2011. Between the 13<sup>th</sup> October and the 21<sup>st</sup> January 2011 the applicant made an additional 8 requests. By offering the property earlier at the end of the bidding cycle would have reduced the anxiety for the customer and also reduced refusals as the customer preferred to wait to see if they were successful for their original bid which they accepted.

## **There are no consequences for general applicants for refusals**

- Applicants in the General category frequently turn properties down if offered. Having to contact the top applicants in the shortlist who have no intention of even viewing creates a lot of wasted work for the housing officer. For example a 2 bed house in Kimberworth was advertised on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2011. This property was offered to the General applicant at the top of the shortlist but they refused to accept the offer stating that they don't want it. As General applicants aren't affected following continual refusals this applicant has so far made 12 further requests, some of which they are not eligible for.
- By not reviewing or applying any sanctions to General housing applications, some applicants continually make speculative bids and are not making a serious commitment when they bid.
- Customers are making requests for properties with a lack of consideration of whether or not they would properly consider the property if they were to be made an offer. With private rented lettings the applicant will "think it through" before making a request, for example by viewing the immediate locality and undertaking some research into the local area, they may still then decide against a property when viewing, but some applicants in the CBL system appear to be bidding before they have given proper consideration as to whether or not they have a serious interest in a particular property.

### **7.5 Actions to improve the process**

The following actions will improve the customer's experience and performance against refusal rates. These are:

**ACTION - Applicants be encouraged to carry out some research into the area before making a request. This will be promoted by:**

- *Advisors should support the customer and asking if they have researched the area, encouraging the customer to view the area if practicable, and if not provide more information about the area through the development of local information leaflets*
- *Prompts can be included on the internet which will prevent the applicant making a request until they have answered YES to having researched the area.*
- *Posters, leaflets and other signage can also encourage the applicant to check the area out prior to bidding.*
- *A "Tip for the Day" displayed on the new kiosks in the Property Shop.*
- *Provide Google Street View on individual property adverts, and the provision of information to tenants on local areas. This will be required both electronically and in hard copy format.*

**ACTION – Reduce the number of speculative bidders, (i.e. those applicants who are constantly bidding and are not prepared to move when are offered a property). We will ensure this happens by:**

- *Imposing a short term suspension from bidding following 2 refusals in all groups including both the priority and general group. The proposed penalty is a suspension of the customer’s application, as opposed to total cancellation as this would go against the Code of Guidance in Allocations. These applicants will be suspended until they have had an interview to discuss their circumstances, housing options and understanding of the letting scheme.*
- *Developing a leaflet which details the consequences of refusing 2 properties. This would be issued at the initial application stage.*

**ACTION - Give real time feedback to the customer i.e. queue position when bidding:**

A case study relating to feedback identified that Mrs X came top of a shortlist for 3 bedroom house on Broadway East, the shortlist was produced on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2011. On the 18<sup>th</sup> March (37 days later) she signed for a property on Park Road. Broadway East was signed up to the person who came 5<sup>th</sup> on the shortlist on the 21<sup>st</sup> March. Mrs X would have preferred the property on Broadway East and would have waited to be housed there had she known.

- *Feedback will be available when the new Abrisas system goes live in September 2011.*

**Action – We should arrange viewing with the new tenant before the existing tenant has left. We will need to:**

- *Change the termination procedure requesting that the outgoing tenant allow viewings before they move. Alternatively where this is not appropriate to arrange a viewing on the receipt of keys before the void repairs are ordered. The latter can accommodate multiple viewings.*

**7.6.** The 1<sup>st</sup> column in the table below details the current process and the 2<sup>nd</sup> column shows how we can make improvements to the CBL processes and the Allocation Policy.

<b>Current Process</b>	<b>New Process</b>
Households in the priority group are time-limited. There is evidence that customers feel that they have got to actively bid in order for their priority not to be cancelled. This means that some people are regularly bidding for properties that they do not want.	All applicants who have been awarded priority status have a case officer. The case officer to provide more information to the customer about the area and bidding process
Households in the General Group aren't affected if they continually	The Allocation Policy (section 5) outlines the impact of refusing an offer.

<p>refuse properties. Some applicants keep coming at the top of the shortlist with no intention of moving house in the first place.</p>	<p>Applicants in the Priority group lose their priority status following 2 refusals. If the Policy was amended so that ALL groups, including General applications, were reviewed following 2 refusals, applicants would give more careful consideration to their requests.</p> <p>Imposing penalties goes against the Code of Guidance however in order to reduce refusal rates most authorities are now starting to suspend applicants from the bidding process for 6 or 12 months, another option would be to cancel the application altogether.</p> <p>An alternative for those households who refuse 2 properties would be to suspend until the applicant has had a review interview to discuss preferences and housing options. However this would incur additional staff time to undertake the review meeting.</p>
<p>There are delays in verifying shortlists. The current verification process means that applicants aren't contacted until the property is ready to view. This means that applicants make a request and then may have to wait several weeks or months (long term voids) before they are contacted to make the offer. In the meantime the applicant continues to make requests for other properties. They often appear on the top of other shortlists, view out of curiosity but refuse as they would prefer to wait for their original requested property.</p> <p>As the verification process isn't undertaken while the property is ready to let when a customer is contacted by a Neighbourhood Champion regarding viewing a property, the pressure to view that property as soon as possible is evident and often the customer will be asked to view within the next 24</p>	<p>Verify and offer at the end of the bidding cycle. The early viewing can only be achieved by viewing the property whilst the previous tenant is still in situ. As part of the termination process the outgoing tenant should be informed that this will occur.</p> <p>Arrange multiple viewings following the receipt of keys from the outgoing tenant. This will enable the property to be let on the 1st and only viewing date.</p> <p>On long term voids, show the applicant around the property. Advice what work will be carried out within what timescales and the standard it will be brought up to.</p> <p>When the applicant accepts, this must be input on the computer and the applicant requested to sign a form of acceptance. Their application will be cancelled and this will prevent any further bids.</p>

<p>hours. Contacting the customer in good time and even before the property is ready to view gives the opportunity to visit the area and consider the move.</p> <p>A complaint has been made by a gentleman who was unable to take a call during working hours. When he contacted the Neighbourhood Champion the following day he was told he had “missed out” and the property had been given to the next person on the list.</p>	
<p>Applicants are currently restricted to making 3 bids per week; however the current ICT system doesn't monitor this so in effect applicants can make as many bids as they like.</p>	<p>In September 2011 Abrisas will be live and this system will automatically restrict bids to 3 per weekly bidding cycle.</p>
<p>Customers currently don't know where they are in the bidding process; so inevitably applicants make requests, with little thought as there is the perception that if they don't make requests then they will never be made an offer. Ultimately when they are successful and are approached to make the offer the applicant refuses because it's not really what they want.</p>	<p>Applicants need to know where they are in the bidding process to aid efficient bidding. In September 2011, Abrisas will be live and the system will give the customers a real time queue position Applicants can change/withdraw their 3 bids during the advertising cycle.</p> <p>Touch screen kiosks will be available in the Property Shop.</p> <p>An automated telephone bidding line will give queue positions in 10 languages.</p>
<p>Applicants who have been made an offer are currently allowed a cooling off period.</p>	<p>On viewing the applicant should be in a mind set that they want the property with the intention of accepting. If this property was a private rented or mortgage property customers would be expected to make a firm commitment after viewing.</p>
<p>There is a perception that customers with Priority Plus can refuse properties and still be allowed to retain their Priority Plus status. Sometimes the customer feels that as they are in real urgent housing need the Council will allow multiple refusals.</p>	<p>Amend existing leaflets to contain information about refusals and the impact of refusing.</p>

Older applicants often make requests but are then faced with barriers to assist them with moving, often they are too proud to ask for help and give another reason for refusal	In June external funding will facilitate a small team that will support customers and identify and remove barriers to moving to a smaller home. But again if the applicant isn't prepared to move for what ever reason they should be discouraged from bidding in the first place.
Sometimes applicants may feel pressured by other members as there maybe medical reasons and they need to move as opposed to wanting to move, deep down they would prefer to remain living where they are.	The medical assessment team who have made the assessment to undertake the viewings on adapted properties. The officer who has made the assessment of the customers medical needs will be able to explain to the customer how the property or adaptations will help them in their daily living.
The offer isn't made until the property is ready to let. This causes delays when applicants cannot be contacted to verify their application. Applicants are giving a period to make contact before the offer is made to the next applicant	To verify applicants within 48 hours of the close of bidding. Applicants should be made aware that at the time of the bid they must provide up to date contact details. If housing is unable to successfully contact within 48 hours this would result in the bid being withdrawn and the property being offered to the next suitable bidder

**7.7 Provision of Information** - The 1<sup>st</sup> column in the table below details the current provision of information. The 2<sup>nd</sup> column shows how we can make improvements which will enable the customer to make more informed decisions about the property before they make a request

<b>Current Process</b>	<b>New Process</b>
<p>Advert information – information about the local area is available on the web via links from the adverts. There is limited information for applicants who do not use the web about the local area. i.e. schools, shops, crime rates etc</p> <p>Property advert photographs – the photographs of properties look appealing but can sometimes be misleading of the area when the customer actually attends the viewing.</p>	<p>Where the customer cannot access the web the Allocation officer will verbally provide all the local information on verification, and encourage the applicant to visit the area for themselves. Applicants would be encouraged to take more responsibility and make enquiries about the area prior to bidding.</p> <p>Information to encourage the customer to act responsibly and to “check out” the area could be displayed on posters, on “pop ups” on the website, in the Allocation Policy Summary booklet and within annual review letters. This could</p>

	<p>also form part of the conversation from advice workers and be an automated message on the bidding line.</p> <p>Google Street View to be linked to all adverts.</p>
<p>CBL helps the customer see how few properties become available. The aspirations of a customer maybe for a particular area and property type but if the council don't own any in these in the area they want to live the applicant needs to know this.</p>	<p>Managing expectations - Provision of information about the stock and property types in localities including turnover.</p>

**7.8 The Housing Register** - The housing register application form is designed to identify housing needs. Customers complete a housing application and this is input directly onto a data base, no further contact is made with the customer until they are offered a property, This means that during this period (from applying to go on the housing register to being made an offer) the application may not be in the correct category or family group. E.g. on receipt no checks are undertaken to verify the accuracy of information and throughout the period change in customers circumstances over a number of years could affect their application status and they be in the wrong category when an offer is made.

Knowing what the applicants current circumstances are is crucial when making requests as they need to be in the correct queue position in the shortlist prior to making an offer. This will ensure that applicants are only able to bid for properties they are eligible for. E.g. single persons to be able to bid for flats (only) and families for houses.

Correct information should be gathered and confirmed with the customer early on when the customer applies. At this point other housing options and needs can be identified and advice provided on any former tenant arrears. The customer can then be kept in contact by undertaking regular housing register reviews. Both of these processes are not currently being undertaken in a timely fashion.

The table below details how we can make changes to ensure up to date information is contained in the Housing application, as ultimately any incorrect data impacts on refusal rates.

<b>Current Process</b>	<b>New Process</b>
<p>The current CBL system enables applicants to make requests for properties that they are not eligible for, and this wastes time in the offer process. Sometimes applicants fit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verify on receipt of a housing application, this will ensure applicants can bid for properties that meet their family size and will alert the customer to any debt they may have from</li> </ul>

<p>their circumstances around the criteria of the property. I.e. single people bidding for houses.</p>	<p>former tenancies early on. This creates more work for staff early on at the initial application stage but ultimately reduces unproductive work by reducing ineligible bids, creates sustainability as the customers needs match the property and will reduce former tenant arrears and recharges for damages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new Abtritas CBL ICT system will not allow applicant to bid for properties they are not eligible for so it is imperative the correct data is recorded on applications.</li> <li>• Undertake annual Housing Register Reviews will ensure applications are kept up to date with changes of circumstances</li> <li>• Alert the Housing Champions on receipt of a transfer application. An existing tenant must keep their current property in a satisfactory condition before Housing will offer the tenant another property. The application should be suspended where the property is found to be in an unsatisfactory condition.</li> <li>• Verify the successful application when they appear at the top of the shortlist at the end of the weekly bidding cycle not when property is ready for letting.</li> <li>• Empower and encourage customers to update their own records online.</li> </ul>
<p>The current CBL system allows applicants who have been previous tenants with rent arrears, to bid for properties even if they are not eligible, sometimes these applicants are unaware that they have any rent arrears, and this can be quite a shock when they are informed of their arrears on viewing and how this affects their application.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise customers of former tenant's arrears on receipt of termination – This can be verbally when the customer 1<sup>st</sup> notifies of intention to terminate.</li> <li>• Send an Acknowledgement termination letter which includes a statement of arrears and arrangements to repay</li> <li>• On receipt of a new application from a former tenant, advice the customer verbally and in writing of arrears, and make arrangements to repay.</li> <li>• The new Abtritas system will not allow applicant with arrears to make</li> </ul>

	property requests until they have met the 13weeks criteria or cleared arrears
--	---

**7.9 The list of refusal reasons should be amended** as some are verification; acceptance or administration reasons not refusal reasons. Those detailed in the table below are not refusal reasons and should be removed.

Rent arrears	1
Firm offer other property	1
Firm Offer Accepted	6
Offer Misinput	17

**7.10 Inappropriate re-housing.** In certain circumstances applicants may be excluded from Rotherham’s Housing Register under the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002. An exclusion from the Housing register is where Rotherham decides that it should not re-house the applicant for a set period of time.

However in some cases the history of the applicant is not known until the applicant has made a bid and may appear at the top of the shortlist and be due to be made an offer. In these cases where a local letting policy does not exist there is little time to consider exclusion. There are also cases where applicants request a property that is not suitable. i.e. it is too small or the applicant needs adaptations and the property does not meet the requirements.

It is proposed that the Allocation Policy be amended so that we reserve the right not to offer a property requested by the applicant.

Examples of circumstances where this will apply will include, but not be restricted to, if the applicant:

- Requests an area where they may be unable to sustain a tenancy from lack of support
- Requests a property that is too small for their family circumstances and this would lead to an unacceptable overcrowding or cramped living conditions of the property including non statutory overcrowding
- Has specific needs for disability adaptations and the property does not meet these requirements
- Has previously been involved in a breach of tenancy conditions in an area
- Has been involved in anti social or criminal behaviour in an area

- Has been involved in actions that, if they were a Council tenant, would have been a breach of the housing's conditions of the tenancy

Individual cases that are being considered by Housing Assessment Panel for Priority Plus status will also take the above criteria into account when making their decision. This list is not exhaustive and all cases will be assessed on an individual basis,

Housing should also be able to decide that it is in the best interests of the applicant that they only be offered a particular area, type of property or a specific property. Where this applies the applicant will be advised in writing of the reasons for this decision.

**7.11 In addition to the recommendations regarding the voids process noted in Section 7.2 further recommendations regarding CBL are:**

#### **Amendments the Allocation Policy**

- Reserve the right not to offer a property requested by the applicant as defined in section 7.9
- Include a short term suspension of application following 2 refusals in both the priority and general groups. The applicants will be suspended from the bidding process until they have had a review meeting with the Housing Options team.

#### **Amendments to the CBL process**

- Verify applications within 2 days of the close of the weekly bidding cycle
- Amend the termination process to arrange viewing with the new tenant before the existing tenant has left.
- Amend the refusal reasons

#### **Amendment to the administration of the Housing Register**

- Verify applications following receipt of a new application
- Provide housing options on receipt of a application
- Arrange for Housing Management to visit transfer applications to determine any breaches early on
- Undertake annual housing register reviews

#### **Provision of advice and Information**

- Case officers to provide more information to the customer about the area and bidding process and to discourage the applicant from bidding until they have researched the area.
- Develop an information leaflet, prompts on the internet, posters, and other signage to encourage the applicant to check out the area prior to bidding.

## **8. Financial implications**

**8.1** The review of the housing register and provision of more information, such as the Allocation Policy Summary booklet and Refusal Leaflets requires additional resources. The refusal information will be incorporated into the Allocation Policy Summary booklet as opposed to a separate leaflet. Any additional costs will be met from the saving made from ending the use of the Rotherham Advertiser. (March 2011) There are financial implications for staffing costs if penalties aren't imposed following 2 refusals. Private Letting agencies apply an administration fee to cover their costs.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

**9.1** The risks include meeting customer expectations, lack of understanding of the processes which affects the reputation of the Council associated with people waiting for a home, increasing the volume of face to face enquiries visiting the Key Choices Property Shop – currently averaging at 2000 customers each week and the number of telephone enquiries has increased to 100 per day.

**9.2** Availability of affordable, quality housing is a key concern for customers and Elected Members. With high demand for housing, it is important that the process for allocation and letting is transparent otherwise it may damage the public perception of the Council and its partners.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

There are a range of policy and performance implications associated with this report:

### **Performance implications**

- Impact on Performance measures such as NI 156 – “reduction in use of temporary accommodation
- BVPI 212 targets
- Void Management Processes and staffing resources.

### **Policy implications**

- Housing Strategy
- Allocation Policy
- Homelessness Prevention Action Plan

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

### Background papers

- Scrutiny review report for Choice-Based Lettings process and Voids Scrutiny review (reported separately)

- HQN publication “ *What does excellence look like in Allocations and Lettings*”
- HQN publication” *Managing Housing Registers in England*”

### Consultation

Officers within RMBC and 2010 Rotherham Ltd have been involved in the development of the new processes and have been consulted on the content of this report. A range of information, good practice and evidence has been provided and included in the report.

### **Contact Name:**

**Dave Richmond, Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods**

**Sandra Tolley, Housing Choices Manager, Extension 6561,  
[sandra.tolley@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:sandra.tolley@rotherham.gov.uk)**