

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

**Venue: Town Hall, Moorgate
Street, Rotherham**

Date: Monday, 30th November, 2009

Time: 10.00 a.m.

A G E N D A

1. To determine if the following matters are to be considered under the categories suggested, in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended March 2006).
2. To determine any item which the Chairman is of the opinion should be considered later in the agenda as a matter of urgency.
3. Choice Based Lettings – Improving the Service from a Customer Perspective (Pages 1 - 53)
4. Scrutiny Review - Void Turnround Times (Pages 54 - 72)
5. Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring up to 30th September, 2009 (Pages 73 - 76)
6. Exclusion of the Press and Public
Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in those paragraphs indicated below of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.
7. Sheltered Housing Warden Accommodation (Pages 77 - 82)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))
8. No. 2 Hollytree Avenue Maltby (Pages 83 - 89)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))
9. Non Traditional Property Review (Pages 90 - 100)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))
10. Neighbourhood Centres Investment Programme (Pages 101 - 107)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))

11. Investment Review of Non-traditional Properties at Montgomery Square, Wath upon Dearne (Pages 108 - 114)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))

(The Chairman authorised consideration of the following item to enable the matter to be processed.)

12. Sheltered Housing Warden Service (Pages 115 - 121)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER

1. Meeting:	CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
2. Date:	30 NOVEMBER 2009
3. Title:	<i>Choice Based Lettings – Improving the Service from a Customer Perspective</i>
4. Programme Area:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

This report provides commentary and summarises progress made against the recommendations of the Sustainable Scrutiny Review into Choice Based Lettings (CBL) – ***improving the service from a customer perspective***. All the recommendations of the CBL Scrutiny Review have been actioned. The report was endorsed by Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel and Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee at their meetings of 16 July 2009 and 24 July 2009 respectively and Cabinet on 23rd September 2009

6. Recommendations

- **THAT CABINET MEMBER SUPPORTS THE REQUEST THAT COMMENTARY AND PROGRESS AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATIONS IS CONSIDERED BY CMT AND CABINET ON 3RD DECEMBER 2009**

7. Proposals and details

7.1 Context

7.1 By providing a wider choice where properties are advertised and let in a transparent way through a choice based letting scheme most local authorities have seen a rise in interest which has increased the numbers of households on their housing register. Demand on local housing in Rotherham remains high with over 20,826 households currently on the housing register. It is therefore an ongoing pressure to manage customer expectation against a finite resource of housing stock.

In these circumstances, it is essential that the lettings system is fair and transparent. The purpose of the Scrutiny Review was to find out the customer experience of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Service and to identify any gaps in the service and any areas of work for further development. The term “choice based lettings” is used to mean that an authority uses an advertising scheme as part of its allocation policies.

Following the Scrutiny Review and findings the Key Choices team, Assessment team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd's Empty Homes team met and developed an Improvement Plan which is now in place to ensure that areas for development and subsequent gaps in the CBL processes are addressed.

The CBL Scrutiny Review did not comment in any depth on the process for turnaround of void properties as this was addressed in a separate Scrutiny Void's Review which was endorsed by Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel and Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee at their meetings on 16th July 2009 and 24th July 2009 respectively, and Cabinet on 23rd September 2009. However, it has since come to light that there are concerns regarding void properties and this issue is now being looked at separately. RMBC officers are currently undertaking detailed pieces of work that relate to void turnaround times, this includes RMBC's Service Performance Team carrying out a number of 'reality checks' of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's performance on void turnaround times.

7.2 Progress against the recommendations of the scrutiny review

All the recommendations of the CBL Scrutiny Review have been actioned. The report provides commentary on the Scrutiny Review of Choice Based letting's recommendations (Appendix A1) and details the progress made against the 24 recommendations. (Appendix B).

In summary progress made to date is:

- Further consultation and an analysis of the impact of introducing a Sub-Regional Choice based Letting (CBL) scheme has been undertaken.
- Increased nominations to 100% with 5 RSLs,
- The Allocation Policy now makes reference to the Adult social care assessment through revised Allocation Policy procedures.
- An evaluation of under occupancy in Council tenancies has been completed and we are exploring incentives to encourage tenants to downsize.

- A consultation exercise has been undertaken in respect of the “Fair and Flexible Guidance.” Over one thousand customers completed and returned a survey. The feedback will be reflected in future changes to the Allocation Policy, which is expected to be reviewed late November in conjunction with statutory guidance to be issued by CLG some time this month.
- First progress report for social housing (including the future options for Council Housing) will be presented to Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods in Jan 2010, and then we will provide quarterly reports on progress against 2010 Rotherham Ltd’s improvement plan, and a final report in late 2010 on future delivery of council housing services
- A choice based lettings software package is being procured which will only allow customers to bid for properties that they are eligible for and provide real-time lettings feedback, giving the customer a queue position.
- Key Choices have developed weekly reports to inform of real- time numbers on housing register, bidders and non bidders.
- A five year business plan has been developed, which maps out the strategic direction for The Key Choices Property Management team (KCPM) – formerly known as the Rotherham Quality Landlord (RQL) for the period April 2009 to March 2014.
- An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) had previously been completed.
- Customers are currently being consulted suggest an alternative title to “Direct Homes”
- Work is currently been undertaken to improve the information given to existing and potential applicants
- The Key Choices website is redesigned and the feasibility of ‘virtual tours’ is being explored.
- Quality control systems are put in place to ensure consistency
- A weekly results sheet has been developed which shows the status of previously advertised properties that are awaiting allocation.
- A value for money exercise in respect of advertising properties via local media has been completed.
- A procedure has been implemented by 2010 Rotherham Ltd which will provide information on empty properties at a local level to Elected Members and Key Choices.

8. Financial implications

8.1 A number of the review recommendations have financial implications. These include virtual property tours and the provision of more information. This has required the Key Choices service to carry out further exploration to identify funding streams. For 2009/10 most of the additional costs are to be met by the homelessness prevention grant

8.2 The opportunity for other landlords to promote their properties with the Key Choices letting scheme, incurs additional costs for advertising and staffing resources. Whilst increasing housing options consideration of all resource implications has been taken into account including the set up and annual costs of ICT CBL software solutions. The set up costs of Abritras (£86K) has been funded through the Housing Investment Programme and the annual support costs to

manage a Common Housing Register and all aspects of the Choice based lettings functions is funded through the Housing Revenue Account (£20K) However some of the costs will be offset by income generated by recharging other landlords advertising charges for properties other than nominations.

8.3 To be considered a three star “excellent” rating where the Audit Commission has commented positively and identified strengths relating to Allocations and Lettings more innovative good practice should be implemented. However, areas to explore around good practice such as: offering financial incentives to single tenants to downsize from a house to a flat or bungalow, or the establishment of Resettlement Officer or team all incur additional costs.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

9.1 There are risks associated with not utilising local media to market empty properties. 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 600 customers per day and the number of telephone enquiries may increase.

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

- Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)
- Rotherham’s Local Area Agreement (LAA) Impact on Performance measures such as NI 156 – “reduction in use of temporary accommodation
- 2010 - BVPI 212 targets
- Audit Commission’s Key Lines of Enquiry
- 2010 Improvement Plan,
- 2010 Void Management Processes.

Policy implications

- Building Britain’s Future (CLG)
- Community Strategy and Corporate Plan
- Housing Strategy
- Allocation Policy – Fair and Flexible guidance

- Homelessness Prevention Action Plan
- Single Conversation (Homes and Communities Agency)

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix A2:	Corporate Management Team commentary on recommendations
Appendix B:	Progress against CBL recommendations
Appendix C:	Briefing paper Sub Regional Choice Based Letting Scheme

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 consulted on the content of this report. A range of information and evidence has been provided and included in the report from:

- The Sustainable Scrutiny Panel
- Customers through a Fair and Flexible survey – 1147 completed surveys
- Development and Solutions Group
- Independent Living (NAS) and 2010 Rotherham Ltd Away day which was focussed developing an improvement plan
- Neighbourhood and Adult Service’s Finance Manager

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Choice Based Lettings – improving the service from a customer perspective – Appendix A1

The Review by the Sustainable Communities
Scrutiny Panel.

Progress updated - October 2009

Recommendations and progress:

1) That a Sub-regional Choice based Letting (CBL) scheme is not supported unless it can be demonstrated that its introduction will have a positive impact on the availability of housing in the Borough.

Progress made:

In July 2009 a briefing paper detailing the concept of a Sub regional CBL Scheme (appendix C) was presented to the Scrutiny CBL Review group. It should be noted that the review group were not persuaded that a sub-regional scheme would bring added value to people in Rotherham as the review group felt that its introduction may place greater pressure on the housing register in the borough.

The briefing paper explained that “Homes for All” the Government’s 5-year housing plan, made clear that the Government is keen that CBL’s should operate sub-regionally, recognizing that housing markets do not always follow local boundaries. There are 19 Sub Regional Choice based lettings schemes that are now in operation. A sub regional CBL Scheme will enable greater mobility and breaks down artificial boundaries; it will bring together a larger pool of available housing, giving home- seekers more choice and helping to ease localised problems, of low or high demand.

Further work has been undertaken to demonstrate that a sub regional scheme would have a positive impact of available housing in Rotherham.

- An analysis of the housing register and comparisons to those within the sub region has been undertaken. Below is the latest available benchmarking information which is taken from the 2007/08 Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) returns. This shows that by joining with Barnsley and Doncaster, would increase the supply of available housing for Rotherham people by 40,537 and reduce the pressure on the housing register against the percentage of stock from 98% to 69%.

Local Authority (LA)	LA Stock (Excl RSL's)	Number on the Housing Register	% against stock
Barnsley	19,516	6,097	31%
Doncaster	21,021	15,973	75%
Rotherham	21,289	20,826	98%
Sheffield	42,470	92,515	217%

All the local authorities in the sub region including Rotherham operate an open Allocation Policy; this means that households who live outside their Borough are eligible to apply for housing in the normal way. An analysis of COntinuous REcording (CORE) for year 2008/9 shows that there is consistent mobility within the sub region.

- During 2007-2008 a total of **138 households** moved out of **Rotherham to take up social housing elsewhere**
- During 2007-2008 a total of **52 households** moved into Rotherham and became **RMBC tenants**

Of those 57 households who moved into Rotherham during 2007/8 the table below details where the household lived previously

Previous Address	Number of Households moved into Rotherham
Barnsley	5
Bassetlaw	1
Blackpool	1
Camden	1
Chesterfield	1
Doncaster	17
Durham	1
Kennet	1
Kingston upon Hull	1
North East Derbyshire	2
Sheffield	20
Wigan	1
Total	52

- During 2008-2009 a total of **113 households** moved out of **Rotherham to take up social housing elsewhere**
- During 2008-2009 a total of **57 households** moved into Rotherham and became **RMBC tenants**

Of those 57 households who moved into Rotherham during 2008/9 the table below details where the household lived previously

Previous Address	Number of Households moved into Rotherham
Amber Valley	1
Barnsley	10
Bassetlaw	1
Blyth Valley	1
Chesterfield	1
Doncaster	10
East Riding	1
Kingston upon Hull	1
Newark	1
North East Derbyshire	2
Preston	1
Sheffield	25
West Lindsey	1
York	1
Total	57

- **Consultation** - During a 6 week period - July 09 to August 09 - 1173 customers completed a survey "Fair and Flexible – *“Have your say on proposed changes to the way we provide housing for people of Rotherham.”* Customers feel very passionate about the way Council housing is offered; this was evident in the high volume of responses. As part of the consultation questionnaire Customers were asked "***should we help people get housing so that they can move between local areas within south Yorkshire***". In total 888 customers responded to this question (62.5%) 169 strongly agreed and 386 agreed, 199 had no view and 134 disagreed.

2) That proposals are put forward to ensure that all housing associations in the Borough release 50% of their empty properties for allocation through Key Choices.

Progress made:

- 100% nominations with 5 RSLs, including South Yorkshire Housing Association, Archers, Anchor, Sadelok and Great Places.
- 100% nominations with all new build housing association properties
- 100% nominations for move on accommodation and are working with Supporting People accommodation providers to raise awareness of availability.
- In the process of developing a Common Housing Register with RSLs, in conjunction with new CBL software.
- RSL Nomination Performance meetings held every 3 month with all RSL's

3) That the Allocations Policy makes explicit reference that the caring responsibilities of non-domicile carers can be taken into consideration when determining the applicant's housing category.

Progress made:

- The Allocation Policy now makes reference to the Adult social care assessment through revised Allocation Policy procedures. The following statement has been included:

Following assessment in respect of requesting to move to provide support, a priority will be awarded if the following information is received:

- *Assessment identifies that care and support is given to the customer daily*
- *Care given must be personal care e.g. assisting with bathing, dressing, medication etc.*
- *Confirmation of the support given to be obtained by Social Care Assessment (if one undertaken by Adult Services)*
- *Distance to provide care and family commitments will be taken into account*

4) That this Scrutiny Panel receives further reports on how under-occupancy in social housing can be addressed.

Progress made:

- A letter has been posted to all under occupiers currently on the housing register encouraging a move to a smaller home. Since the January 2009 there has been 156 households awarded Priority status for under-occupying.
- An evaluation of under occupancy has been completed by 2010 Rotherham Ltd, the results have identified that there are 5,000 three bedroom and 100 four bedroom Council homes that are occupied by a single person.
- The Housing Options Manager has attended a seminar presented by Communities and Local Government regarding under occupancy. Leeds City Council promoted their under occupancy scheme which offers £1000 per bedroom to under occupiers. This means that someone who moved to a flat or bungalow from a 3 bedroom house would receive £3000.

Further actions are to:

- Utilise the names and address list from the 2010 tenancy checks and write to all under occupiers living in council tenancies - promote downsizing – i.e. energy savings etc
- Promote that priority will be given to tenants downsizing into new build schemes – council houses and RSL stock.
- Explore if the Fond Farewell package can be extended to include further incentives
- Explore whether 2010 Rotherham Ltd, from within its existing framework can create a moving house company. – That can offer free gratis packages such as arranging utility transfers and a moving service for downsizes.
- Promote energy efficiency/wastage for under occupancy – provide case studies that promote how much households spend on energy utilities before and after a move.
- Develop a mutual exchange system that promotes under occupancy through choice based lettings
- Become a member of Home Swapper scheme
- Advertise on digital TV

5) That the impact of the Allocations Policy is regularly monitored by this Scrutiny Panel.

Progress:

As part of the Fair and Flexible consultation more one thousand customers completed and returned a survey/questionnaire providing us with good intelligence about what needs to be done to improve the Allocation Policy. Based on the results of the survey, we have began work to put forward

options to revise the Allocation Policy, to improve understanding of the scheme and to improve it's legitimacy with residents. In considering changes we will consider the strategic market assessment, be compatible with the Housing Strategy and be consistent with the local authorities Homelessness Prevention Strategy. The Allocation of Accommodation under Part VI of the Housing Act is one of the main ways in which Rotherham discharges its homelessness duty.

Based on customer feedback from the survey areas within the Allocation Policy that we are considering change are:

- Develop Local Lettings Policies in Rural areas to give priority to local connection
- Develop Local Lettings Policies to help more customers move home to gain employment possibly look to create more mixed communities by setting aside a proportion of vacancies for applicants in employment.
- Revisit the concept of a sub regional choice based letting scheme
- Changing the quota system to give more priority to applicants in the general group with long waiting time. Currently only 10% of properties are offered to the General Group.

In setting our quotas we will take into account the size of the housing register, and composite groups, profile of stock and turnover of property

- As part of the 'Inspection Action Plan' to address the recommendations from the Care Quality Commission Inspection of Adult Social the revised Allocation Policy will ensure that will we increase options for disabled people of all ages.
- A briefing session for Sustainable Scrutiny Panel regarding the impact of the Allocation Policy and proposals for change has been arranged for 10th December 2009 and an All Member Seminar for 12th January 2010.

6) That further reports are presented to the Scrutiny Panel on options for social housing (including the future options for Council Housing)

Progress:

- First progress report to be presented to Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods in Jan 2010, and then provide quarterly reports on progress against 2010 Rotherham Ltd's improvement plan, and a final report in late 2010 on future delivery of council housing services.

7) That a system for the introduction of 'real-time' feedback be introduced as a matter of urgency. This feedback should include property specific information, relating to which need group it will be offered to and an indication of the length of time on the housing register needed to be able to qualify for the shortlist.

Progress:

- The Housing Options team provide weekly feedback on letting results which are published on the internet, the Property Shop and local Neighbourhood 2010 offices. The Housing Options team have benchmarked with other Local Authorities (LA) and RMBC's Legal Service to ensure that data protection is adhered to. The results show that all LA's follow data protection by removing the house number – this process is adopted in Rotherham.
- A clause is included in the Allocation Policy Summary booklet explaining that details of lettings will be published.
- The Housing options team are in the process of procuring a choice based lettings software package which will only allow customers to bid for properties that they are eligible for and provide real-time lettings feedback, giving the customer a queue position. A project group has been established to develop the ICT systems, with an anticipated implementation date of March 2010.

Further actions to explore are:

- Housing Quality Network has recently published a briefing paper covering Allocations and lettings looking at the attributes of an excellent three star organisation inspected by Audit Commissioning 2007 and 2008. . Areas of good practice are:
 - Explore the introduction a resettlement team or Resettlement Officer – Your Homes Newcastle has a “Pathway team” who support customers and care providers. It is designed to help homeless people and hospital patients into settled accommodation. Overall the service is making a major contribution to homeless prevention, tenancy sustainment, hospital discharge and refugee integration.
 - Explore the appointment a Resettlement Officer to oversee the needs of vulnerable applicants, including supporting households to make property requests and support those households who are ineligible for housing due to rent arrears or anti social behaviour.

8) That robust measures are put in place to ensure that the Housing Register is as an up to date, accurate and effective database of customers. To support this, that a random 'audit' of cases takes place throughout the year to ensure that the database is continuing to be effective.

Progress:

- Continue to monitor outcomes of lettings by participating fully in COntinuous REcording (CORE), which provides profiled reports about the new tenants of all new lettings. Details include, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disabilities, income, source of income and economic status, including occupation of head of household. The main reason why

the household has left their last settled home is also recorded. During 2008/09 one of the main reasons that customers moved home was that their property was unsuitable due to ill health or disability.

- Weekly reports have been developed to inform of real- time numbers on housing register, bidders and non bidders
- A bi monthly training programme has been implemented to raise understanding of inputting and updating of housing applications
- The Housing Options team are in the process of procuring a CBL software package that manages the housing register, each application will be reviewed annually.
- Weekly reporting tools have been developed that highlights “inputting errors.” The officer who has made the error is contacted to discuss, if there is a training issue appropriate support/training is implemented.

9) That the current appeals procedure against removal and/or re-assessment of registration date, be reviewed to ensure that they are adequately meeting the needs of customers, and that this system is clearly outlined to applicants.

Progress:

- An analysis of the housing register has been completed and the finding are to be reported to DMT and Cabinet Member (Oct/Nov 09)
- An ICT software package is being procured which will facilitate monthly housing register reviews, this is expected to be implemented March/April 2010

Areas to be developed:

- Embed good practice identified in two recent Housing Quality Network publications, “Managing Housing Registers in England” and “What does excellence look like? – Allocations and Lettings”
- Develop an information leaflet to provide advice regarding the housing register review process.

10) That a review of the effectiveness of the Quality Landlord Scheme is undertaken.

Progress:

- A five year business plan has been developed, which maps out the strategic direction for The Key Choices Property Management team (KCPM) – formerly known as the Rotherham Quality Landlord (RQL) for the period April 2009 to March 2014. The core business is to increase the KCPM portfolio of private rented accommodation as alternative housing options, improve standards and maintain decency levels in private rented accommodation in Rotherham and assist in the prevention of homelessness and the reduction in usage of temporary accommodation.

- In August 2009, a 12 hour Private Landlord Extravaganza was held. This event provided existing and new landlords with advice and information about letting private rented accommodation. It was a very successful event and was well attended by private landlords. Three new landlords joined the accreditation scheme increasing the KCPM portfolio by 20 properties.
- Regular liaison meetings are now held with housing benefits to ensure that systems are in place to support vulnerable customers in paying their rent – this includes a process to make direct payments to Landlords as opposed to the tenant if there is a risk of non payment.
- All front line Key Choices staff has been trained in housing benefit verification. This means that the staff can verify income details on behalf of housing benefits which speeds up the claim process.

11) That full equality monitoring of successful and unsuccessful bidders is undertaken (not just on the basis of ethnicity) to inform service improvement and that the Equality Impact Assessment is updated on the basis of this information.

Progress:

- Equality Monitoring ICT reports are being developed for both bidders and non bidders, this will include age, ethnic origin, sexuality and gender.
- An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and will be updated in line with the results.
- Customers completed the equalities monitoring questions on the Fair and Flexible questionnaire, 88.9% answered this question, 70% were female, 64% were between the ages of 18 to 54, 14% had a long term disability, 14% were Carers, 92% were White British and 3.4% declared they were lesbian or gay, and 0.9% declared they were bi-sexual.
- A new housing application is being developed in partnership with housing associations; this will include all equality strands. Arbritas the new CBL software will facilitate the new improved housing application form.

12) Explore whether an alternative title to “Direct Homes” can be developed which is more ‘user friendly’, descriptive of its purpose and is easily understood by the public.

Progress

- A weekly article has been published in the Rotherham Advertiser on the Key Choices Property page during May to August 09.
- During November a consultation exercise focussed on Direct Homes is planned for the Property Shop. This will capture customers understanding of Direct Homes and suggested name changes will be captured.

13) That work is undertaken to improve the information given to existing and potential applicants to ensure that there are clear, simple instructions about how and where to bid (so customers bid on

properties that they are interested in); and the rationale for prioritisation of bids

Progress:

- Reality Checks to be undertaken by the Service Quality Team through Customer to Customer questionnaires at Key Choices Property Shop on a monthly basis (commencing end Oct 09).
- A Summary guide which details a step by step guide is displayed at the Key Choices Property Shop and Neighbourhood Offices and is included with the acknowledgement letter sent to new applicants.
- Develop an occupancy level guide which will be posted with a housing application acknowledgement is an agenda item for next Development and Solutions group meeting (Dec 09)
- Development of a stock profile which will be posted with the housing application acknowledgement and displayed in a range of outlets is an agenda item for (Dec 09)
- An explanation to customers of what properties they are entitled to is a design feature of Abris which is expected to be in operation March 2010
- Developing a frequently asked questions is an agenda item for the Development and Solutions group meeting in Nov 09
- An Assessment Officer, Jan Frost, who is based in the Housing Assessment team, is undertaking awareness sessions for parents and children with learning difficulties. The first information sessions are to be held at Hilltop at Maltby and then Kelford School at Meadow bank. The sessions are called "Life after Hilltop/Kelford" The aim is to roll these sessions into all schools and to be mainstreamed into the schools citizenship curriculum.

Further actions:

- Develop a joint protocol and assessment process with Children and Young People Services aimed at assisting 16/17 year olds who require accommodation and support.
- Establish a project group to develop information about leaving home which will targeted at 16/17 year old. As part of the consultation process other agencies who work with young people such as Rush house, Action Housing and Action for Children will be involved.

14) That the website is redesigned using best practice from other authorities. As part of this redesign, the feasibility of 'virtual tours' and links with other public services should be explored.

Progress:

- The Housing Options team have met with Fluid and an ICT company to organise virtual tours of properties to commence Nov/Dec.
- Still photo shots have been taken of Borough which will be included in Property Adverts in November 09.

- Key Choices website has links to information for the local areas on the individual property adverts; information is retrieved through an Information Viewer and includes local details of; the Name of the Ward, Local Councillors, Primary and Secondary Catchment areas, Area Assembly, details of the local library, the nearest waste and recycling centre, bus and train travel information, aerial photo graphs, Neighbourhood statistics., housing market renewal pathway information, Up my street, Council Tax Band, links to Planning with details of planning applications in the local area.
- Additional telephone line to be installed in the Property Shop
- Housing Choices Officers walk the floor in the Property Shop to assist customers with advice and information and will support customers with operating the Virtual booth

Further actions:

- Further improvements to the website design will be implemented with the introduction of Jada, the Councils website management system and Abritras.
- 2010 Rotherham Ltd to explore options for funding to purchase additional virtual booths in Neighbourhood Offices.

15) That systems are put in place to 'quality assure' the information published via the web and other avenues to ensure consistency.

Progress:

- Systems are in place to ensure all property adverts are quality checked and signed off by the Housing Options Manager before publishing
- Implemented fortnightly meetings with 2010 Empty Homes Manager and Housing Options Manager
- Streamlined the advertising processes to reduce duplication and potential for human errors.

Further actions:

- Quarterly programme of reality checks to be implemented and conducted by the Customer Inspectors (commencing Nov)

16) Customer feedback forms should be located in a more prominent position on all web-pages, including those hosted on the 2010 Rotherham Ltd website.

Progress:

- Completed this has been moved to a more prominent position on the Key Choices Website

17) That consideration be given to giving fuller descriptions of properties, including indication of garden sizes.

Progress:

- The property adverts have been reviewed and now includes the following information; room sizes, type of adaptations, property type and number of bedrooms, if the property is furnished or not, if pets are allowed or not, local lettings policies, utility suppliers, eligibility rules i.e. families and couples are eligible for houses. The garden description includes open or enclosed – to front and rear. Further information regarding the size of the garden is to be requested from the Empty Homes team within 2010 Rotherham Ltd at the next liaison meeting.
- Still photographs and virtual tours are being finalised.

18) That the weekly results sheet also reports the status of previously advertised properties that are awaiting allocation.

- A weekly report is currently being developed which will capture all voids where the property has been advertised. The results will be published weekly on the internet, in the Key Choices Property Shop and in Local neighbourhood Offices.

19) That proposals are put forward to improve communications and working processes between Key Choices Team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd. This should include measures to ensure that bids received at outlying offices and by telephone are recorded and communicated.

- Fortnightly liaison meetings have been established with the Housing Options Manager and Coordinator and 2010 Rotherham Ltd Empty Homes Manager and Voids Controller.
- Customers will be able to view the status of their previous bids on the new ICT CBL system.
- Mystery Shopping exercises and a Quarterly programme of reality checks to be implemented and conducted by the Customer Inspectors (commencing Nov)

20) That information given out at Neighbourhood Offices is comprehensive and consistent. To support this, training should be undertaken with relevant officers in central and Neighbourhood Offices to ensure that they are aware of current developments and processes; this should be updated on a regular basis to address any issues of staff turnover.

Since the implementation of CBL's there has been difficulties in that some 2010 Rotherham Ltd staff has struggled to understand the processes of CBL's and the Allocation Policy. This is attributed to the turnover of staff and new appointments who have limited knowledge of the system including the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities in relation to homelessness. As a

consequence, customers are being redirected to the Property Shop for advice, and often customers have previously been misinformed.

Progress:

- Considerable resources have been committed to train staff on all lettings issues. A bi monthly timetable of free training is offered by Key Choices team to all RMBC and 2010 Rotherham Ltd staff that provides advice to customers regarding rehousing. The training includes the Allocation Policy, Choice based letting processes and ICT training of how to register and update a housing application. The take up of the training has been high.
- Further work has also taken place to streamline systems and procedures with 2010 staff.
- A reporting tool has been developed which highlights errors that individual staff have made when inputting a housing application. The staff member who has made the error is contacted by the Key Choices team and actions taken – i.e. if there is a training need, the team will organize work shadowing or attendance to the training sessions.
- All new 2010 Rotherham Ltd staff whose role is offering customers advice regarding rehousing now attends a full day in the Property Shop as part of their induction.
- Implement monthly mystery shopping activities at Neighbourhood Offices conducted by the Customer Inspection Service team (Dec 09)
- The Service Quality team are undertaking customer journey mapping through Home Truths Diaries. They have recruited 1 Home Truths video diary and are undertaking a weekly recruitment campaign.
- The Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Directorate's Service Quality Team carried out a random telephone survey of 8 customers who have recently taken up tenancies and the findings are as below;
 - ❖ **75%** of customers were satisfied with the service received from 2010 Rotherham Ltd when moving into a home.
 - ❖ **76%** of customers were happy that staff treated them politely, friendly and fairly.
 - ❖ **100%** of customers were happy time taken from making a bid for this property to the time taken for 2010 staff to contact you to verify your application details
 - ❖ **76%** of customers were happy with the time taken from making a bid for this property to moving in to the property.
 - ❖ **None** of the customers received a House proud bucket

21) Ensure relevant and appropriate information about local lettings policies and the housing history of prospective tenants are communicated to RSLs/private landlords.

- A common housing application is being developed in conjunction with Housing Associations. The new housing application will include a joint information sharing protocol which will comply with data protection legislation and will enable each RSL's to view the housing history of prospective tenants.

- Local Lettings Policies are published on the Internet.

22) That the process for advertising properties via local media is examined to ensure it is the best use of staff resources and provides value for money.

In 2005, when Key Choices was first launched, a weekly mailing list was produced and posted out to approximately 1000 vulnerable households. In addition to staff time to produce the mailing list there were additional costs for printing and postage of £1000 per week. Often customers visited the Property Shop to collect a mailing list but had previously advised us that they couldn't access any information point where properties were displayed i.e. the internet, their local neighbourhood office or the Property Shop. A survey was implemented and customers told us that they would like to view the Property Adverts in the Local News paper. This prompted negotiations with the Rotherham Advertiser, whose distribution is over 29,000 purchases per week. This paper actually reaches more people as the paper is often recycled with the household by family members passing onto others to read.

Processes were established to ensure that the properties are advertised within the weekly cycle giving careful consideration to ensure the property is advertised in the termination period ensuring that there is no impact on void relet times.

The Key Choices Property Page is full colour and is published in the "Property Section" along with other housing options with local estate agents.

The cost for the Key Choices Property page is £500 per page per week as opposed to £1000 per week for the mailing list other added benefits are that the Advertiser provides additional copies of the news paper for no extra cost. The additional copies of the Property Pages are used to find alternative accommodation in the private rented sector by the Housing Solutions Officers to assist in prevention of homelessness.

To ensure that the process for advertising properties via the Rotherham Advertiser is still providing value for money an analysis of how many customers purchase the advertiser to specifically view Key Choices Property page is being undertaken.

The results of the value for money exercise so far are:

Profile and volume of customers:

- Older People tend to prefer to use the Advertiser to view adverts
- 1006 customers were asked through an online and face to face survey where they currently look to find accommodation in Rotherham, 27% (279 people) told us that they only used the Advertiser, 46% (464 people) used the Property Shop, 10% (110 people) used their Local Neighbourhood Office, 52% (526 people) the Key Choices website and (9& (91 people) didn't respond.

- All Housing Association new build developments and relets are marketed on Key Choices Property page, and the RSL is recharged by Key Choices. The RSL's along with Private Landlords who are part of Key Choices Property Management view the low cost of advertising in the Key Choices Property Page as an incentive to be part of the Key Choices Scheme.

Further Research:

- A dedicated Key choices telephone request line (335005) is in operation and this is managed by RBT Connect. RBT were approached to request that for a two week period the telephone call centre operator asks applicants (telephone callers) an additional question of where the customer viewed the adverts. Unfortunately RBT advised that there would be an additional charge of over £1000 to undertake this on off survey.
- The Housing Options team utilise Right Move to advertise private rented properties. For a two week period an alternative request line telephone number will be published in the Rotherham Advertiser – this will be a 0845 number that is then redirected to RBT Connect. The number of calls can be logged and this will determine how many customers have used the Rotherham Advertiser. There is no extra call charge for the customer but there is a risk that some customers store the 336005 telephone number into their contact list in their mobile so not all customers will be captured.
- A further face to face and telephone survey will be undertaken to determine more details of how many customers use the Advertiser to view Property adverts

The cost and distribution of the Property Adverts through local media:

	Cost per page £	Distribution	Distribution Frequency
Rotherham Advertiser	£500	29,000 + family recycling	Weekly – every Friday
Rotherham News	2000 with a potential discount of 20% = £1600	Every household in Rotherham	Monthly – distribution cycle 7 to 10 days
Mailing List	£1000	To 1000 vulnerable households	Weekly

- There are alternative options to consider if the final results show that the Rotherham Advertiser is not widely used meaning that it is not value for money. However if this is the case the proposal would be to stop using newspapers as a media outlet as there is no other newspaper that is distributed as widely and is published weekly. Note that Rotherham News is distributed monthly and is not delivered on the same day to every household. This means that even if the publication

was made weekly the distribution is over a period of seven to ten days meaning that adverts would be published and households would miss the weekly advertising cycle to make a request. i.e. if the newspaper was delivered after the Tuesday 4pm request deadline.

An alternative option is:

- To utilise the savings to pay for a resettlement officer, who could offer personal support to vulnerable households. They would provide advice to customers of properties available; explain what the customer is eligible for, including arranging repayment plans for those customers on the register who are in arrears. In addition the Resettlement Officer could advice on a range of housing options, including private rented, housing association and home ownership.

23) Review the information sent to all Councillors so that they are well placed to answer any housing queries from their constituents. Drawing on good practice from several wards, Members should be encouraged to work closely with Housing Champions to organise 'housing surgeries' to address specific issues about the application process.

- A procedure has been implemented by 2010 Rotherham Ltd which will provide information on empty properties at a local level to Elected Members and Key Choices. This has been implemented by linking with Neighbourhood Champions weekly estate management updates.
- Letting results are published on Key Choices web page and emailed direct to Elected Members.
- The letting results will be published in Rotherham Advertiser where space permits.

24) That regular Member briefing/ information sessions on housing related matters are held, particularly following any significant changes to policy.

- The Housing Choices Services are in the process of developing a Media Plan.
- A briefing session for Sustainable Scrutiny Panel regarding the impact of the Allocation Policy and proposals for change has been arranged for 10th December 2009 and an All Member Seminar for 12th January 2010.
- An Elected Member Briefing has been distributed regarding the Fair and Flexible consultation.
- Continue with Community Surgeries which are lead by 2010 Rotherham Ltd in Neighbourhood Offices.

Corporate Management Team's Commentary on Scrutiny Review of Choice-based lettings - improving the service from a customer perspective

Appendix A2

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
<p>Choice Based Lettings review</p> <p>1) That a Sub-regional Choice based Letting (CBL) scheme is not supported unless it can be demonstrated that its introduction will have a positive impact on the availability of housing in the Borough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further consultation undertaken as part of Fair and Flexible – Customers were asked “should we help people get housing so that they can move between local areas within south Yorkshire” Present information to Sustainable Scrutiny panel in December 09 with details of results of Fair and Flexible consultation, lettings in and out of the Boroughs, and numbers on housing registers in sub region. We are opposed to setting up a Sub regional team 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase available and mobility housing by widening customers housing options to the Sub region Shared infrastructure with a better understanding of need <p>Risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased numbers of customers wishing to move into the Rotherham Borough, however this can be closely monitored and changes to the Scheme adopted to keep the balance of mobility to similar 	<p>ICT set up costs £2000 per organisation</p> <p>Shared annual support costs per organisation of £6000</p>	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
				levels across the Boroughs		
Choice Based Lettings review 2) That proposals are put forward to ensure that all housing associations in the Borough release 50% of their empty properties for allocation through Key Choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Supporting People accommodation providers to raise awareness of move on accommodation owned by Housing Associations Develop a Common Housing Register to increase from 50% to 100% nominations 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in the housing register and better accessibility for customers seeking to move home Risk: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Associations reluctance to offer more than 50% nominations 	ICT set up costs £2000 per organisation Shared annual support costs per organisation of £6000	
Choice Based Lettings review 3) That the Allocations Policy makes explicit reference that the caring responsibilities of non-domicile carers can be taken into consideration when determining the applicant's housing category.	Consideration was given to Carers within the Medical Assessments but an explicit Carers statement has now been included in Housing Allocation Policy	September 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved understanding of Allocation Policy assessment procedures Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not disseminated to 	Leaflet Publication Print and design cost approximately £2000 (and subsequent reprinting costs)	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
				Carers – need to develop information leaflet.		
<p>Choice Based Lettings review</p> <p>4) That this Scrutiny Panel receives further reports on how under-occupancy in social housing can be addressed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce under occupancy through a range of options including increase participation in mutual exchanges and promote priority status and explore incentives to downsize Undertake tenancy checks of all stock to determine occupancy levels 	Feb 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the availability of family accommodation which will reduce the number of families on the housing register Prevent homelessness and reduced the usage of temporary accommodation The household will save on energy costs <p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the increase in voids and associated 	<p>VOIDS repairs and void rent loss</p> <p>Cost of media to raise awareness and promote downsizing</p> <p>Cost of incentives – Leeds offer £1000 per bedroom. i.e. a tenant would receive £2000 if they moved from a 3 bedroom house</p>	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
				costs		
Choice Based Lettings review 5) That the impact of the Allocations Policy is regularly monitored by this Scrutiny Panel.	Ensure Sustainable Scrutiny Panel receive updates every 6 months to increase understanding, and to ensure that the Allocation Policy reflects the needs, demands and aspirations of local people, whilst also giving priority to those in the greatest housing need.	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	Benefits: Increase Elected Members understanding of the Allocation Policy so that they can disseminate information and advice to their constituents during surgeries	Can be met through staff time in existing budgets	
Choice Based Lettings review 6) That further reports are presented to the Scrutiny Panel on options for social housing (including the future options for Council Housing)	This is a separate subject matter and should form part of the CBL review. It will be addressed subject to progress with 2010 Rotherham Ltd on an Improvement Plan	December 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy 	Benefits: See comments Risks: Se comments	Will be considered as part of the first progress report to be reported to Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods in Jan 2010	
Choice Based Lettings review 7) That a system for the introduction of 'real-time' feedback be introduced as a matter of urgency. This feedback should include property specific information, relating to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of ways to advertise lettings results and different methods to provide more information for customers and Elected Members, 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More information will enable customers to make informed decisions regarding their 	HRA associated cost of establishing a resettlement team, range from £28K to 56K depending on the number	

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which need group it will be offered to and an indication of the length of time on the housing register needed to be able to qualify for the shortlist.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Quality Network has recently published a briefing paper covering Allocations and lettings looking at the attributes of an excellent three star organisation inspected by Audit Commissioning 2007 and 2008. . Areas of good practice are to establish a resettlement team. 			bids, which should reduce the number of customer enquiries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A resettlement team of officer will provide support to vulnerable people Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The numbers of households on the housing register fluctuates and turnover of stock is dependent of customers moving out. This can quickly change the waiting times for areas. 	of staff in post. However some of the HRA staffing costs can be met through staff time in existing budgets, or alternatively ceasing other functions.	
Choice Based Lettings review 8) That robust measures are put in place to ensure that the Housing Register is as an up to date,	Effective management of the Housing Register – introduce a package of measures to ensure it is kept up to date, including monthly	May 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in the housing register 	Cost of ICT set up of a Housing register Module £20K and annual support costs	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
accurate and effective database of customers. To support this, that a random 'audit' of cases takes place throughout the year to ensure that the database is continuing to be effective.	data cleansing		s Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011	Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vulnerable customers removed from the housing register as they have not responded to the review letter 	Cost of review letters and information leaflet	
Choice Based Lettings review 9) That the current appeals procedure against removal and/or re-assessment of registration date be reviewed to ensure that they are adequately meeting the needs of customers, and that this system is clearly outlined to applicants.	To manage the housing register effectively by keeping it up to date and provide information to customers regarding the review process. This recommendation will be incorporated into recommendation 8.	May 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in the housing register Risks: <p>Vulnerable customers removed from the housing register as they have not responded to the review letter</p>	Cost of ICT set up of a Housing register Module £20K and annual support costs. Cost publication and postage of the review letters and information leaflet	
Choice Based Lettings review 10) That a review of the effectiveness of the Quality Landlord Scheme is undertaken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Quality Landlord Scheme is now known as the Key Choices Property Management (KCPM) The service has been reviewed, The scheme has developed a 5 years business plan and improvement plan.. The KCPM's core business is to increase the KCPM portfolio of private rented accommodation 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Sector Housing renewal 	Benefits: <p>Improve standards of private sector housing</p> Risks: <p>The portfolio of private rented properties for 2009/10 must retain</p>	The KCPM will be self financing in 2010/11	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
	and improve standards and maintain decency levels in private rented accommodation in Rotherham to assist in the prevention of homelessness and the reduction in usage of temporary accommodation.			the target of 116 properties. The scheme is self financing and is dependent on income generated from management fees		
Choice Based Lettings review 11) That full equality monitoring of successful and unsuccessful bidders is undertaken (not just on the basis of ethnicity) to inform service improvement and that the Equality Impact Assessment is updated on the basis of this information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) already undertaken to ensure that the 7 equalities strands Equality monitoring of housing applications is completed on a monthly basis 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 Equalities and Diversity 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will ensure that services and procedures are not having an adverse impact on a particular group of people due to gender, race or disability. Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To plan for costs of negative impacts – where we identify any potential for negative impact, we should consider making changes. E.g. failure to provide information about services in community 	Costs of developing monitoring reports can be met through staff time to develop reporting tools in existing budgets. Cost of translation into Community Languages	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
				languages has a negative impact as people cannot access services they do not know about.		
Choice Based Lettings review 12) Explore whether an alternative title to “Direct Homes” can be developed which is more ‘user friendly’, descriptive of its purpose and is easily understood by the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct homes information published in advertiser weekly during May to August 09. Consultation exercise planned for November with customers to capture suggestions and understanding of the public’s view of Direct Homes 	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe - Alive Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 Equalities and Diversity 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in void relet times of Direct homes Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	Costs of undertaking consultation can be met through staff time.	
Choice Based Lettings review 13) That work is undertaken to improve the information given to existing and potential applicants to ensure that there are clear, simple instructions about how and where to bid (so customers bid on properties that they are interested in); and the rationale for prioritisation of bids.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To undertake reality checks: area offices, mystery shopper Allocation policy booklets are supplied to all customers, along with application acknowledgment letters Occupancy level guides included with acknowledgement letters, Frequently asked questions developed 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase customer understanding, resulting in a reduction of enquiries and customers view the scheme as being more transparent. Risks:	Cost of publication and postage of the information leaflets. £5000 Virtual tours £200 each property. Staff time to attend schools to provide	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show visual property standards through virtual tours on 2010 site, with link to Key choices To mainstream information sessions about finding accommodation and leaving home into schools citizenship curriculum. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure vulnerable customers have support to understand the processes 	information about leaving home and finding accommodation	
<p>Choice Based Lettings review</p> <p>14) That the website is redesigned using best practice from other authorities. As part of this redesign, the feasibility of 'virtual tours' and links with other public services should be explored.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redesigning the key Choices website in conjunction with a CBL ICT system including links to Google Earth and other public services Virtual tours will be included in the property adverts Photos of localities uploaded Stock Profiles uploaded on website Self service ICT booths in 2010 customer service centres 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers can make more informed decisions regarding making property requests, which may reduce refusal rates <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Properties are still occupied by the previous tenant when advertised – Risk that virtual tour cannot be completed 	<p>£200 per property for virtual tour x 1000 voids = £200,000 per annum.</p> <p>Costs of developing stock profile reports can be met through staff time</p>	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
Choice Based Lettings review 15) That systems are put in place to 'quality assure' the information published via the web and other avenues to ensure consistency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve the Key Choices website by introducing more quality checks Quarterly programme of reality checks to be implemented and conducted by the Customer Inspectors (commencing Nov) 	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	Benefits: Improve satisfaction levels Risks: None	Incorporated into staff time and Customer Inspection group	
Choice Based Lettings review 16) Customer feedback forms should be located in a more prominent position on all web-pages, including those hosted on the 2010 Rotherham Ltd website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The feedback form has been moved to a more prominent position on the Key Choices Website. 	November 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 Customer excellence 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase customer feedback to improve service delivery Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing expectations with the current demand for accommodation 	Incorporated into staff time	
Choice Based Lettings review 17) That consideration is given to giving fuller descriptions of properties, including indication of garden sizes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The property adverts have been reviewed and now includes fuller further information regarding the size of the garden is to be requested from the Empty Homes team within 2010 	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve understanding of facilities within the property - Potential to 	Publishing costs and staff time	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
	Rotherham Ltd at the next liaison meeting.		Plan 2008-2011	<p>reduce refusal rates</p> <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverts get too much detailed and too large to publish effectively 		
<p>Choice Based Lettings review</p> <p>18) That the weekly results sheet also reports the status of previously advertised properties that are awaiting allocation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A weekly report is currently being developed which will capture all voids where the property has been advertised. The results will be published weekly on the internet, in the Key Choices Property Shop and in Local neighbourhood Offices. 	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotherham Safe, Learning • Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved information to customers and reduction in enquires <p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	Staff time to produce weekly report	
<p>Choice Based Lettings review</p> <p>19) That proposals are put forward to improve communications and working processes between Key Choices Team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd. This should include measures to ensure that bids received at outlying offices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce fortnightly liaison meetings with operational staff • Customers able to view the status of their previous bids on the new ICT CBL system. • Mystery Shopping exercises and a Quarterly programme of reality checks to be implemented and conducted by the Customer Inspectors 	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotherham Safe, Learning • Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a seamless CBL and Void service <p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where issues are identified by the mystery shopping 	Staff time to attend and deliver training	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
and by telephone are recorded and communicated.	(commencing Nov)			exercise – A rolling programme of staff training must be implemented – this may impact on staffing resources to attend and deliver training		
Choice Based Lettings review 20) That information given out at Neighbourhood Offices is comprehensive and consistent. To support this, training should be undertaken with relevant officers in central and Neighbourhood Offices to ensure that they are aware of current developments and processes; this should be updated on a regular basis to address any issues of staff turnover.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Allocation Policy Training every two month with a rolling programme Reality Checking/mystery shopping, 	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighbourhood staff to provide a better and consistent advice service for the customer. Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff retention 	Staff time to attend and deliver training	
Choice Based Lettings review 21) Ensure relevant and appropriate information about local lettings policies and the housing history of prospective tenants are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved nomination procedures, and capture local letting information 	March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased knowledge of prospective tenants which will create 	ICT costs of setting up a Common Housing register – Initial set up costs of Common	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
communicated to RSLs/private landlords.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local lettings Policies reviewed every 6 months Develop a Common Housing register which will enable RSLs to view all details of applicants 		Prevention Action Plan 2008-201	sustainable tenancies Risk: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure data protection is met by provision of a joint information sharing protocol 	Housing Register and CBL ICT module £64K – and annual support costs of £20K - Already included in budget	
Choice Based Lettings review 22) That the process for advertising properties via local media is examined to ensure it is the best use of staff resources and provides value for money.	Undertake a consultation exercise to evaluate usage of current local media Explore other local media outlets to, determine advertising timeframes and costs as comparatives Explore other innovative methods to advertising properties	January 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-201 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective use of resources which offer Value for Money Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure vulnerable customers are not disadvantaged by any media changes 	Rotherham Advertiser £500 per Property Page – weekly distribution to 29,000 households, and meets the weekly advertising cycle. No impact on staffing resources Rotherham News £2000 per page – deliver and printing	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
					<p>timeframe outside the bidding cycle. No impact on staffing resources</p> <p>Weekly Mailing List – cost £1000 per 1000 customers – major impact on staffing resources – not ECO friendly.</p> <p>Alternative – not to use local media and replace with Resettlement team.</p>	
<p>Choice Based Lettings review</p> <p>23) Review the information sent to all Councillors so that they are well placed to answer any housing queries from their constituents. Drawing on good practice from several wards, Members should be encouraged to work closely with Housing Champions to organise 'housing</p>	<p>Letting results published on Key Choices webpage and emailed direct to Elected Members.</p> <p>Monthly email updates for Elected members broken down by each area assembly?</p> <p>Housing Champions to introduce more Community Surgeries</p>	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotherham Safe, Learning • Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-201 	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected Members and applicants are well informed and kept up to date <p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of staff time to undertake 	<p>Undertake surgeries within existing staff resources</p>	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication <i>Impact on revenue/capital budget, MTFS</i>	
surgeries' to address specific issues about the application process.				Community outreach		
Choice Based Lettings review 24) That regular Member briefing/ information sessions on housing related matters are held, particularly following any significant changes to policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected Member Briefings embedded into service delivery Continue community surgeries lead by 2010 Rotherham Ltd in Neighbourhood offices 	December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotherham Safe, Learning Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-201 	Benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected Members are well informed and kept up to date Risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of staff time to undertake Community outreach 	No costs as already included within existing staff resources	

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSL Nomination Performance meetings held every 3 month with all RSL's 	Completed	
For Cabinet Member						
3. That the Allocations Policy makes explicit reference that the caring responsibilities of non-domicile carers can be taken into consideration when determining the applicant's housing category.	Carers explicit statement in Housing Allocation Policy	Diane Green	Sep 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the Allocation Policy make reference to the Adult social care assessment 	Completed	Leaflet Publication Print and design cost approximately £2000 (and subsequent reprinting costs)
For Cabinet Member						
4. That this Scrutiny Panel receives further reports on how under-occupancy in social housing can be addressed.	Reduce under occupancy	Tracie Seales/ Sandra Tolley	Feb 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase participation in mutual exchanges Undertake tenancy checks of all stock to determine occupancy levels Explore incentives to encourage tenants to downsize Promote incentives and write to all under occupiers – Priority to downsize in Allocation Policy 	On Target Completed On Target On Target	<p>Voids repairs and void rent loss</p> <p>Cost of media to raise awareness and promote downsizing</p> <p>Cost of incentives – Leeds offer £1000 per bedroom. i.e. a tenant would receive £3000 if they moved from a 3 bedroom house</p>

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For Cabinet Member						
5. That the impact of the Allocations Policy is regularly monitored by Scrutiny Panel.	Increase understanding, that the Allocation Policy reflects the needs, demands and aspirations of local people, whilst also giving priority to those in the greatest housing need.	Sandra Tolley	Dec 09	Ensure Sustainable Scrutiny receive updates every 6 months	On target	Can be met through staff time in existing budget
For Cabinet Member						
6. That further reports are presented to the Scrutiny Panel on options for social housing (including the future options for Council Housing)	Future options for Council Housing	Jane Davies Haire	Dec 2010	Produce quarterly reports on progress against 2010 Rotherham Ltd's improvement plan, and a final report in late 2010 on future delivery of council housing services.	On target	Will be considered as part of the first progress report to be reported to Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods in Jan 2010
Key Choices						
7. That a system for the introduction of 'real-time' feedback be introduced as a matter of urgency. This feedback should include property specific information, relating to which need group it will be offered to and an indication of the length of time on the housing register needed to be able to qualify for the shortlist.	Increase the number of ways to advertise lettings results to target customers and Members,	Sandra Wardle	Sept 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results published without number of house due to a reviewing any data protection issues Clause in summary booklet explaining that details of lettings may be published 	Completed	HRA associated cost of establishing a resettlement team, range from £28K to 56K depending on the number of staff in post. However some of the HRA staffing costs can be met through staff time in existing budgets, or
				Completed		
			Dec 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequently asked questions 	On Target	

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			March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procure ICT which will only allow customers to bid for properties that they are eligible for and provide realtime lettings feedback 	On Target	alternatively ceasing other functions.
<p>Key Choices</p> <p>8. That robust measures are put in place to ensure that the Housing Register is as an up to date, accurate and effective database of customers. To support this, that a random 'audit' of cases takes place throughout the year to ensure that the database is continuing to be effective</p>	Effective management of the Housing Register – introduce a package of measures to ensure it is kept up to date, especially data cleansing	Sandra Wardle	Nov 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly reports developed to inform of numbers on housing register, bidders and non bidders All contact from customers regarding rehousing , prompts automatic update of their application 	Completed Completed	<p>Cost of ICT set up of a Housing register Module £20K and annual support costs</p> <p>Cost of review letters and information leaflet</p>
<p>Key Choices</p> <p>9. That the current appeals procedure against removal and/or re-assessment of registration date, be reviewed to ensure that they are adequately</p>	Manage the housing register effectively by keeping it up to date	Sandra Wardle	March 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake monthly Housing Register Reviews Housing Register Review procedure revised (Jan 09) Develop and implement monthly housing register review 	On Target	<p>Cost of ICT set up of a Housing register Module £20K and annual support costs.</p> <p>Cost publication and postage of the</p>

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meeting the needs of customers, and that this system is clearly outlined to applicants.				<p>procedure with ICT software (March 10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to customers regarding the review process 		review letters and information leaflet
<p>Key Choices</p> <p>10. That a review of the effectiveness of the Quality Landlord Scheme is undertaken</p>	KCPM reviewed, with 5 years business plan and improvement plan. .	James Greenhed ge	March10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotherham Quality Landlord Scheme rebranded to Key choices property Management (KCPM) • KCPM Operations reviewed monthly as part of 5 year business plan, to ensure that the scheme is cost effective and self funding 	Completed	The KCPM will be self financing in 2010/11
<p>Key Choices</p> <p>11. That full equality monitoring of successful and unsuccessful bidders is undertaken (not just on the basis of ethnicity) to inform service improvement and that the Equality Impact Assessment is updated on the basis of this information.</p>	Equality monitoring of housing applications is completed on a monthly basis,.	Sandra Wardle	Dec 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken to ensure that the 7 equalities strands are met. • Dual reports needs to be devised to capture success and unsuccessful applicants 	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p>Costs of developing monitoring reports can be met through staff time to develop reporting tools in existing budgets.</p> <p>Cost of translation into Community Languages</p>
<p>Key Choices</p>	Customers have a better understanding of Direct homes	Sandra Wardle Adrian	Dec 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of Direct Homes Published in 	On Target	Costs of undertaking consultation

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<p>12. Explore whether an alternative title to "Direct Homes" can be developed which is more 'user friendly', descriptive of its purpose and is easily understood by the public</p>		Cheetham		<p>Rotherham Advertiser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore alternative names for Direct Homes. 		can be met through staff time
<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>13. That work is undertaken to improve the information given to existing and potential applicants to ensure that there are clear, simple instructions about how and where to bid (so customers bid on properties that they are interested in); and the rationale for prioritisation of bids</p> <p>VOIDS REVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure customers are better informed about how the Choice Based Letting scheme works 	Improving information for potential customers to understand and use the allocation process	Dave Roddis Sandra Wardle Lynne Hamshaw Adrian Cheetham	March 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reality checks: area offices, mystery shopper Allocation policy booklets are supplied to all customers, along with application acknowledgment letters Occupancy level guides included with acknowledgement letters, Provide explanation to customers what properties they are entitled to Frequently asked questions. Show visual property standards through virtual tours on 2010 site, with link to Keychoices 	On Target	<p>Cost of publication and postage of the information leaflets. £5000</p> <p>Virtual tours £200 each property.</p> <p>Staff time to attend schools to provide information about leaving home and finding accommodation</p>

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeting different groups, using A place of your own booklet younger peoples guide, also devising other leaflets for other client groups 		
<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>14. That the website is redesigned using best practice from other authorities. As part of this redesign, the feasibility of 'virtual tours' and links with other public services should be explored.</p>	Redesigned and improved website	Phil Syrat Adrian Cheetham Lynne Hamshaw	March 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redesigning website in conjunction with Abris system including links to Google Earth and other public services Virtual tours included in the property adverts Photos of localities uploaded on ICT Stock Profiles uploaded on website Visual self service ICT booths in 2010 customer service centres 	On Target	<p>£200 per property for virtual tour x 1000 voids = £12,000 per annum.</p> <p>Costs of developing stock profile reports can be met through staff time</p>
<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>15. That systems are put in place to 'quality assure' the information published via the web and other avenues to ensure consistency.</p>	Improved website	Sandra Wardle	Dec 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adverts to be signed off by Manager before publishing Fortnightly meetings with 2010 and Key Choices 	On Target	Incorporated into staff time and Customer Inspection group

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<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>16. Customer feedback forms should be located in a more prominent position on all web-pages, including those hosted on the 2010 Rotherham Ltd website.</p>	Improved website	Phil Syrat	March 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise and develop website to ensure maximum customer engagement 	On Target	
<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>17. That consideration be given to giving fuller descriptions of properties, including indication of garden sizes.</p>	Improved and increase information on adverts	Phil Syrat Sandra Wardle	March 10	Expand information details shown on adverts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On Target 	Incorporated into staff time
<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>18. That the weekly results sheet also reports the status of previously advertised properties that are awaiting allocation.</p>	Improved Information for customers	Phil Syrat Adrian Cheetham	Dec 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand information on website 	Completed	Staff time to produce weekly report
<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>19. That proposals are put forward to improve communications and working processes</p>	Improved Communication	Sandra Wardle Adrian Cheetham	September 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication, improved by regularly meetings through the Solutions and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed 	Staff time to attend and deliver training

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<p>between Key Choices Team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd. This should include measures to ensure that bids received at outlying offices and by telephone are recorded and communicated.</p>				<p>meetings and joint action planning and regular allocation and lettings managers meetings</p>		
<p>Key Choices/ 2010 Rotherham Ltd</p> <p>20. That information given out at Neighbourhood Offices is comprehensive and consistent. To support this, training should be undertaken with relevant officers in central and Neighbourhood Offices to ensure that they are aware of current developments and processes; this should be updated on a regular basis to address any issues of staff turnover</p>		<p>Sandra Wardle Adrian Cheetham Jasmine Speight</p>	<p>Dec 2009</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that advertiser Handout is available in area offices, surgeries held by Neighbourhood Champions • To bring all complaints to managers meetings to determine learning • Allocation Policy Training every two month rolling programme • Work shadowing • Reality Checking/mystery shopping, • Mystery application and tracking the progress throughout the CBL process – maybe using one for each area 	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Staff time to attend and deliver training</p>
<p>Information to</p>		<p>Lynne</p>	<p>Nov 09</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedure 	<p>Completed</p>	<p>ICT costs of</p>

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<p>Members</p> <p>21. Review the information sent to all Councillors so that they are well placed to answer any housing queries from their constituents. Drawing on good practice from several wards, Members should be encouraged to work closely with Housing Champions to organise 'housing surgeries' to address specific issues about the application process.</p>	<p>Elected Members are well informed and kept up to date</p>	<p>Hamshaw Adrian Cheetham</p> <p>Sandra Wardle</p>	<p>October 09</p>	<p>implemented to feedback information on empty properties at a local level to Elected Members and Key Choices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly updates from Housing Options on Lettings results 	<p>Completed</p>	<p>setting up a Common Housing register – Initial set up costs of Common Housing Register and CBL ICT module £64K – and annual support costs of £20K - Already included in budget</p>
<p>Information to Members</p> <p>22. That regular Member briefing/ information sessions on housing related matters are held, particularly following any significant changes to policy.</p>	<p>Elected Members are well informed and kept up to date</p>	<p>All Managers</p>	<p>Dec 09</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Media Plan for Neighbourhoods Member Briefing completed for Fair and Flexible consultation Continue with community surgeries lead by 2010 Rotherham Ltd in Neighbourhood offices, 	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Rotherham Advertiser £500 per Property Page – weekly distribution to 29,000 households, and meets the weekly advertising cycle. No impact on staffing resources</p> <p>Rotherham News £2000</p>

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						<p>per page – deliver and printing timeframe outside the bidding cycle. No impact on staffing resources</p> <p>Weekly Mailing List – cost £1000 per 1000 customers – major impact on staffing resources – not ECO friendly.</p> <p>Alternative – not to use local media and replace with Resettlement team.</p>
REMAINDER OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM VOID SCRUTINY REVIEW						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering the role of the Choice Based Lettings team in the Voids management process to avoid the duplication of effort around the screening of bids. 	<p>Improved Verification process:-</p> <p>Identify barriers early and agree actions to prevent customers not being able to be offered properties and remove delays in the process</p>	<p>Adrian Cheetham</p> <p>Sandra Wardle</p>	<p>Sept 09</p> <p>Nov 09</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the procedure for accepting a housing application Learning from or complaints from, people bidding to 	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p>Undertake surgeries within existing staff resources</p>

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve customer experience Acknowledgement letter to include any rent arrears that may have been identified and inform customers of the steps they need to take Pilot paperless applications in one area office to prevent a backlog Agree timescales for verification process once shortlist has been issued 	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>	
			Nov 09			
<p>Information to Elected Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing regular information to Elected Members on the void properties in their ward. When reporting on voids, officers to provide more detailed information about the empty properties to give a clearer picture of why they are empty and the financial implications 	Elected Members are well informed and kept up to date	<p>Lynne Hamshaw Adrian Cheetham</p> <p>Sandra Wardle</p>	<p>Oct 09</p> <p>October 09</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedure implemented to feedback information on empty properties at a local level to Elected Members and Key Choices. Weekly updates from Housing Options on Lettings results 	Completed	No costs as already included within existing staff resources
Clarifying criteria regarding the provision of decorating vouchers and review the current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review decorating voucher scheme, include paint packs, community based 	Adrian Cheetham	Dec 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional benchmarking undertaken and tenants have 	Completed	Financial implications to be assessed as part of the

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allowance of £25 per room.	services such as Groundwork Trust, Anchor Housing etc			reviewed various options. The paint pack was the preferred option		review
Considering a Reward scheme to encourage tenants to leave properties in good condition in line with good practice demonstrated by highperforming ALMOs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reward scheme for tenants moving out – pilot “Fond Farewell” and review effectiveness and costs savings 	Adrian Cheetham	Oct 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The “Fond Farwell” initiative is being piloted for six months with a cost benefit analysis being undertaken to review VFM. 	Completed	Tenants receive £100 as a reward for leaving the property in a good condition – cost met within 2010’s existing resources. Cost / benefit evaluation to be completed in January 2010.
That action taken towards the recommendations of 2010 Rotherham Ltd’s Empty Homes Service Review “Every Day Counts” (April 2009) be monitored and reported back to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in due course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore alternative use of hard to let sheltered and aged persons properties 	Diane Green	November 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report to Cabinet Member about change of use where no demand, to include financial implications 	Completed	Within existing resources

Briefing Paper

Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings (Appendix C)

The Background

Choice based lettings (CBL) allow customers to apply for vacancies which are openly advertised. Applicants can see the full range of available properties and apply for a home.

“Homes for All” the Government’s 5-year housing plan, set out the Government’s strategy for taking forward its CBL’s policy. The aim is to have in place, nationwide choice based lettings by 2010. “Homes for All” also made clear that the Government is keen that CBL’s should operate sub-regionally, recognizing that housing markets do not always follow local boundaries. There are 19 Sub Regional Choice based lettings schemes that are now in operation.

CLG has provided £4M over the last three years to support the development of regional and sub regional choice based letting schemes (CBL’s) in England by the means of a bidding process. The money has been made available over three years (2005-2008.).

There is a final opportunity to apply for funding and CLG have recently approached all LA’s in South Yorkshire to determine whether they are intending to submit a final bid. Doncaster, Barnsley and Sheffield have all expressed an interest in a submission.

. The criteria of the sub regional scheme are that:

- At least 2 Local authorities have indicated that they wish to join;
- RSLs operating in the sub region have indicated that they are willing to be included in the scheme;
- Involvement or plans to work with the private rented sector;
- Partners operate or plan to operate a Common Housing Register;
- Properties are advertised openly and transparently;
- Customers are given generic feedback to the letting results;
- A housing options approach is adopted;
- Value for money is demonstrated.

In October 2005, Rotherham submitted a Sub Regional bid which had been developed in partnership with Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley. However, no progress was made as both Doncaster and Barnsley withdrew their involvement.

Cabinet Member’s view at that time was that this would not now be a true Sub Regional Scheme. The reason that Doncaster withdrew their involvement is that

they were in the process of developing their own Choice Based Lettings scheme, and this was their priority at that time. Barnsley withdrew because they were in the process of reviewing their Allocation Policy.

The aims of a Sub Regional Choice Based Letting Scheme are to:

- Enable greater sub-regional mobility and breaks down artificial boundaries; it will bring together a larger pool of available housing, giving home-seekers more choice and helping to ease localised problems, or low or high demand.
- Improve engagement with Housing Associations operating in Rotherham, the advantages for RSL's is that they cut the costs of being involved in several different schemes. There is also the opportunity to have full membership which would increase nominations rights to 100%
- A letting service within the Sub region that empowers homeseekers to choose a home regardless of the local authority area it falls in,
- One of the features of the scheme will be a joint website, which replicates Rotherham's good practice in full, and will drive the property advertising. All properties for each organisation will be advertised on a weekly basis, with the same open/close day.

The Benefits for the Customers is:

- Better accessibility for customers on all income streams i.e. if you can afford to purchase your home you have the choice of moving across boundaries, whereas if you are on a low income customers are restricted to moving across boundaries and can only access properties in the private rented sector
- A One Stop approach, with a Common Housing Register customers only have to apply once, as opposed to several applications with different Local Authorities and Housing associations
- A better understanding of housing options
- Easy access to information of available homes across the Sub Region

The Benefits for the Partners are:

- One point of contact for Housing Associations. They don't have to have systems in place with different local authorities i.e. Chevin has stock in Sheffield
- Avoids duplication – customers are on several housing registers
- Shared infrastructure with a better understanding of need

- Properties for nomination will automatically be sent for advertising, which means that Housing Associations will have reduced admin requirements so they may be inclined to offer 100% nominations
- The nomination process will be transparent and quicker
- Automatic tracking of results

The risks - by not responding proactively to facilitate mobility could result in the following:

- A rise in homelessness and blockages in temporary accommodation.
- Less effective prevention work.
- Not delivering on Government expectations on delivery of a Sub Regional Scheme.
- Poor service to customers who wish to move across boundaries
- Only receiving 50% nomination rights with Housing Associations, whereas Housing Associations may offer 100% if they are part of a Sub regional Scheme
- Increased numbers of customers wishing to move into the Rotherham Borough, however this can be closely monitored and changes to the Scheme adopted to keep the balance of mobility to similar levels across. There are only small numbers of customers moving into the Borough the 2006 report identified that only 16 people moved into Rotherham who had previously lived outside the Borough

Stock levels for 3 of the Local Authorities in the region are similar. Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham have approximately 20,000 properties each, and Sheffield's portfolio stands at over 50,000.

Key Challenges- If a Sub regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme was approved and funding attained from CLG, there are various options for the delivery of the scheme, which are:

1. All the members of the Sub region advertise all their vacancies in the Sub Regional scheme, but have their own lettings policies, and have ICT systems in place to monitor how many applicants are being rehoused in and out of their own local authorities boundaries
2. Small step approach and offer up a percentage of vacancies to the Sub Regional scheme, where there would be one common lettings policy for all members. (The downside is that it could be confusion for customers having 2 schemes in operation. I.e existing Key Choices and a Sub Regional Scheme)

There would be challenges ahead for both options above and for the scheme to be successful it is suggested that the following are considered:

- To establish an Elected Members Forum who would act as lead
- Consult with customers
- Address any concerns
- To assign a project Officer
- To set up a Project Group with Key decision makers
- Have clear Terms of Reference
- Set out clear criteria
- Develop a partnership agreement with all members of the scheme
- Agree to share project costs – i.e. ICT

The Council's Key Choices Service, together with 2010 Rotherham Ltd would like the Scrutiny Review Panel's view on any potential development of a Sub Regional scheme, which would enhance is existing service.

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER

1.	Meeting	CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
2.	Date	30 NOVEMBER 2009
3.	Title	Scrutiny Review of Void Turnaround Times
4.	Directorate	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

A scrutiny review was carried out to address concerns over the time taken to re-let empty ('void') Council properties. The report was endorsed by Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel and Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee at their meetings on 16th July 2009 and 24th July 2009 respectively, and Cabinet on 23rd September 2009. This report provides an update on progress against the recommendations of the review. Of the seven recommendations, three have been completed and the other four are on target.

6. Recommendations

THAT CABINET MEMBER:

- **NOTES PROGRESS AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW.**
- **NOTES THAT SEPARATE PIECES OF WORK ARE BEING UNDERTAKEN BY RMBC OFFICERS TO ADDRESS (A) REALITY CHECKS OF PERFORMANCE ON VOID TURNAROUND TIMES AND (B) STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES.**
- **AGREES THAT SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL SHOULD RECEIVE A FURTHER REPORT IN APRIL 2010, CONFIRMING COMPLETION OF THE OUTSTANDING ACTIONS WITHIN 2010 ROTHERHAM LTD'S EMPTY HOMES REVIEW ACTION PLAN.**

7. Proposals and details

7.1 Context

Scrutiny reviews were carried out of void turnaround times and the Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) process. Reports on both of these were endorsed by Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel and Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee in July 2009, and by Cabinet on 23rd September 2009. A report on progress against the CBL review is being considered concurrently with this report.

The aim of the scrutiny review into void turnaround times was 'to consider the current process for re-letting void properties and make recommendations for improvements in order to minimise the length of time that houses are empty and provide a more effective service for tenants'. The review report, which is attached as appendix 1, made seven recommendations. A summary of progress against each of these recommendations follows under section 7.2. Three of the recommendations are now complete, and the other four are on target for completion.

It should be noted RMBC officers are currently undertaking two separate, detailed pieces of work that relate to void turnaround times. Firstly, RMBC's Service Performance and Service Quality Teams have carried out a number of 'reality checks' of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's performance on void turnaround times. This work was carried out in response to concerns raised by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel. The reality checks have highlighted concerns over performance and a series of high level meetings will take place to consider action required to rectify this. Secondly, Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel also requested a report on long-term empty properties. This will be presented in December 2009 and will address long-term voids in both the Council's housing stock and the private sector.

7.2 Progress against the recommendations of the scrutiny review

Recommendation 1: *That improvements are made to the CBL process in line with the recommendations of the current scrutiny review.*

Please refer to separate report on progress against the CBL scrutiny review recommendations.

Recommendation 2: *That the verification process is made more efficient by screening out ineligible bids at an earlier stage.*

This recommendation was made in order to deal with delays between Key Choices submitting a shortlist to 2010 Rotherham Ltd and applicants being informed that they are to be offered a property, which has sometimes meant that by the time 2010 Rotherham Ltd has contacted the applicant they have already been re-housed or changed their mind. The Anite IT system has now been updated to include a verification module. This is now completed for all applicants who are verified and duplication has been reduced. Also, the Abrisas system for CBL will only allow eligible bids to be placed.

Recommendation 3: *That clear criteria are published about the circumstances in which decorating vouchers will be issued to new tenants and that the allowance of £25 per room is reviewed.*

2010 Rotherham Ltd is in the process of reviewing the allowance. This review will be completed by the end of November 2009 and recommendations will be reported in early December 2009.

Recommendation 4: *That in line with good practice demonstrated by high-performing ALMOs, consideration is given to a reward scheme to encourage tenants to leave properties in good condition.*

2010 Rotherham Ltd has implemented a 'fond farewell' scheme, which incentivises tenants to leave their home and garden in a good condition by offering a payment of £100. This is being piloted for six months, following which a cost benefit analysis will be completed to evaluate value for money.

Recommendation 5: *That information is provided to Elected Members on a regular basis on the void properties in their ward including reasons why a property is empty and when it is expected to be re-let.*

2010 Rotherham Ltd's Neighbourhood Champions produce a weekly estate management update to Ward Members, and this now includes information about empty properties. Additionally, the Empty Homes Team provides neighbourhood staff with a monthly update for every empty property, stating the estimated completion date and / or reasons for delay.

Recommendation 6: *That more detailed information is provided when reporting on voids to give a clearer picture of why properties are empty and the financial implications.*

In addition to the measures set out under recommendation 5 (above), a joint working group has been established that includes officers from RMBC's Neighbourhood Investment Service, to jointly review properties that have been empty for over 16 weeks. The financial implications are measured by the amount of potential rent lost through properties being left empty.

Recommendation 7: *That action taken towards the recommendations of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's empty homes service review 'every day counts' (April 2009) be monitored and reported back to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in due course.*

2010 Rotherham Ltd produced an action plan to ensure that recommendations made as part of the 'every day counts' review were followed up. Of the 16 recommendation, 12 are either complete or mostly complete. The following items are outstanding:

- Review 'incentives to stay' in order to reduce the number of tenancy terminations received (due to be completed by April 2010)
- Review decoration allowance – see recommendation 3 above (due to be completed by the end of November 2009)
- Review all new procedures (due to be completed by December 2009).
- Review the process of backdating tenancy commencement dates (due to be completed by October 2010)

This report proposes that a further report be provided to Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in April 2010, to confirm that all of these actions have been completed, with the exception of the review of backdating tenancy commencement dates which is due for later completion.

8. Financial implications

The 'fond farewell' reward scheme pilot is being paid for from within 2010 Rotherham Ltd's existing resources, and a value for money review will be completed to assess whether the scheme is contributing to savings.

There are no direct financial implications associated with implementing the other recommendations of the scrutiny review.

Delays to re-letting properties result in the following financial impacts:

- Rent loss through voids (measured by local performance indicator 69)
- The cost of securing empty properties
- Costs associated with antisocial behaviour and vandalism
- Additional temporary accommodation costs as fewer properties are available to house homeless people on the housing register

The separate report on long-term empty homes, which will be provided to Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in December 2009, will examine in more detail the impact of rent loss, and investment requirements for empty homes.

9. Risks and uncertainties

The risks associated with delays to re-letting empty homes include the following:

- Continuing pressures on the housing register
- Negative perceptions of the neighbourhood
- Effect on RMBC's and 2010 Rotherham Ltd's reputation – we should be making the best possible use of the social housing we already have, as well as building new Council houses
- Increased costs (see section 8 above)
- Failure to achieve performance targets and therefore potential implications for the Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment

The final outcomes of the two related pieces of work that are looking at reality checks of 2010 Rotherham Ltd reported performance, and long-term empty properties respectively, are not known at the time of producing this report.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The void turnaround performance indicator (BV 212) is a critical indicator for the Council and 2010 Rotherham Ltd, as it directly affects our ability to meet the needs of customers on the housing register, has implications for the *use of resources* judgment within the Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment, and empty homes can cause blight in neighbourhoods. There are implications for the 'safe' and 'proud' themes within Rotherham's Local Area Agreement.

Management of void turnaround times is one of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's core services. High performance in this area is crucial to achieving the standards set by the Audit Commission and the Tenant Services Authority.

Rotherham's new emerging housing strategy will emphasise the importance of making the best use of our existing social rented homes, which includes ensuring high performance on void turnaround times.

11. Background papers and consultation

Appendices

Appendix 1: Scrutiny review report

Appendix 2: Corporate Management Team commentary on recommendations

Background papers

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

Consultation

Officers within RMBC and 2010 Rotherham Ltd have been consulted on the content of this report.

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RMBC Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel

Scrutiny Review into Void Turnaround Times

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1 / INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reason for the review

The time taken to re-let void properties has been identified as a key concern for Elected Members. Whilst performance is improving, it still falls below expected levels and with the high demand for housing, it is important that properties are re-let on a timely basis to maximise housing options for tenants and Council revenue. Failure to address this issue will have a significant impact on the Housing Revenue Account and may also damage public perception of Rotherham 2010 Ltd and the Council.

It was agreed that a scrutiny review would be carried out to consider the issue in more detail.

1.2 Aim of the review

To consider the current process for re-letting void properties and make recommendations for improvements in order to minimise the length of time that houses are empty and provide a more effective service for tenants.

The working group agreed the following terms of reference to define the scope of the review:-

- (a) To gain an understanding of the key issues affecting voids turnaround times including a clarification of how voids are classified;
- (b) To review the effectiveness and impact of procedures and actions which have already been put in place to improve performance;
- (c) To consider the financial impact of long term empty properties in the borough;
- (d) To consider good practice within the borough and from other local authorities in relation to void turnarounds;
- (e) To consider what further measures could be taken to reduce void turnaround times.

1.3 Scrutiny working group

The scrutiny working group for this review was comprised of the following scrutiny members:

- Cllr Rose McNeely (Chair)
- Cllr Jeb Nightingale
- Cllr Fred Wright
- Cllr Paul Lakin
- Cllr Alex Armitage – Parish Councils’ representative
- Andy Roddison – tenants’ representative

1.4 Methodology

The Scrutiny Panel decided to take a “Select committee approach” to this review meaning that it was completed within a short period of time so that there would be no delay in making the recommendations.

The scrutiny working group met twice to agree the terms of reference for the review, identify witnesses and look at the background information and good practice in other authorities. Meetings were also held with the Chief Executive of 2010 Rotherham Ltd, the Voids Manager and staff at Key Choices Property Shop. Key witnesses were invited to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel meeting on 16th April to give evidence and answer questions put forward by the Panel members.

1.5 Key Findings

The review highlighted that the involvement of several different teams in the management of void properties leads to confusion about who is responsible for each stage of the process and a duplication of effort in some areas. Elected Members are not routinely kept informed about void properties in their wards and local residents are frustrated when they see empty houses in their neighbourhoods that are not available to rent.

The average time taken to re-let empty homes has reduced significantly over the last 12 months and 2010 Rotherham Ltd appear committed to making further improvements to the service. Their recent Empty Homes Review carried out at the same time as this scrutiny review in April 2009 identifies several areas for improvement which have been incorporated into an action plan.

2010 Rotherham Ltd's "Empty Homes Service Review" aims to map out the whole of the voids management process giving consideration to the deployment of resources, accountability, priorities, and benchmarking against other services. Unfortunately the Review was only made available on 15th April and therefore Members did not have time to digest the information before the scrutiny meeting on the 16th April.

1.6 Recommendations

Having considered the available evidence, the scrutiny review group makes the following recommendations:

- 1. That improvements are made to the Choice Based Lettings process in line with the recommendations of the current Scrutiny Review.**
- 2. That the verification process is made more efficient by screening out ineligible bids at an earlier stage.**
- 3. That clear criteria are published about the circumstances in which decorating vouchers will be issued to new tenants and that the allowance of £25 per room is reviewed.**
- 4. That in line with good practice demonstrated by high-performing ALMOs, consideration is given to a Reward scheme to encourage tenants to leave properties in good condition.**
- 5. That information is provided to Elected Members on a regular basis on the void properties in their ward including reasons why a property is empty and when it is expected to be relet.**

6. That more detailed information is provided when reporting on voids to give a clearer picture of why properties are empty and the financial implications.
7. That action taken towards the recommendations of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's Empty Homes Service Review "Every Day Counts" (April 2009) be monitored and reported back to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in due course.

2/ THE VOIDS PROCESS

2.1 What is classed as a void?

Voids are empty homes. They can be classed as VAVs "Voids Available" i.e. ready to be let (perhaps after minor repairs) or VUNs "Voids Unavailable" i.e. those that would require major works to bring them up to a lettable standard.

Currently the VUNs, which may include properties which have been empty for a long time because they are going to be demolished, are still classed as voids and count towards the figures for Local Performance Indicator 212 which looks at the average time taken to re-let a property. As soon as a void property ceases to be a void because it is let, the total number of days it was void is added to the figures. This means that if long-term voids are brought back into the housing stock, the figure for average re-let time could increase dramatically.

2.2 How many voids are there?

On 2nd June 2009 there were 379 empty properties in Rotherham. Of these 228 (60%) are 'Vun' properties (ie – requiring major works to bring them up to a lettable standard) and 151 (40%) are classed as 'Vavs' – voids available to let.

However the 151 available properties include 21 which are not to be let because they are pending demolition or a decision (14 on Dawsons Croft; 2 on Calladine Way; 2 on Becknoll Road and 3 ex-warden flats). It also includes 38 properties which are classed as sheltered, or age-restricted, and as a result are hard to let.

The table below shows a breakdown of the 379 empty properties by Area Assembly:

	Vav	Vun	Total
Rother Valley South	8	25	33
Rother Valley West	10	29	39
Rotherham North	15	50	65
Rotherham South	8	28	36
Wentworth North	37	30	67
Wentworth South	64	55	119
Wentworth Valley	9	11	20

There are currently around 19,000 people on the housing register. If more void properties can be brought up to a lettable standard, this would help to reduce the complaints regarding empty homes.

2.3 Who is involved in the voids process?

In 2007, 2010 Rotherham Ltd undertook a review of the voids service and decided that efficiency savings could be made by creating a centralised Voids team. In April 2009 the name of the team was changed to the Empty Homes team.

In addition to the centralised Empty Homes team, there are several other teams involved in the voids process and it appears that the work is not always joined up. Below is an outline indication of the different areas of responsibility:

- **Empty Homes team, 2010 Rotherham Ltd.**

The voids team complete a pre-termination inspection of the property to assess repair work needed. They carry out the necessary repairs. They receive the shortlist from Key Choices and when the property is ready, they contact the applicants to check that they are eligible, arrange viewings and sign them up to the property.

- **Housing Options team, (Property Shop), RMBC**

The Housing Options team, based within Key Choices receive information that a property is to be vacated and during the 4-week notice period they advertise the property and collate a shortlist of bids which they pass on to the Empty Homes team at 2010 Rotherham Ltd, within 24 hours of the close of advertising. They are not responsible for contacting the people who have bid on the property to verify if they are eligible.

They carry out assessments on customers who may be eligible for properties in the General+ category.

- **Assessment Team, Housing Services, RMBC**

The Assessment Team assess applications for sheltered, aged persons and medical priority housing. The team receive an average of around 220 applications for assessments each month and visit customers to identify their needs in respect of rehousing to suitable properties. The number of applications has increased significantly in the past 12 months. They inform the customers about how to bid for a property and what adaptations they need to look out for on the properties that become available.

They also carry out “mini-assessments” over the telephone for customers who bid for “Direct Homes”. These are properties which are difficult to let and which anyone who meets the advert criteria can bid for. They check that the applicant is eligible and has some level of additional health need.

They check the shortlist of people who have bid on properties in the Priority category to confirm that they have been assessed as meeting the necessary criteria. Sometimes due to customers waiting on the housing list for a long time, their needs change and the team carry out a re-assessment.

- **Estate Management, 2010 Rotherham Ltd**

During estate walkabouts, Neighbourhood Champions inspect void properties to ensure that they are not vandalised and the gardens do not become too overgrown or misused. They report any issues to the Estate Officers and any costs relating to clearing gardens of void properties, for example if they have been used to dump

rubbish, comes from the Estate Management budget. Currently about 65% of all rubbish removal is from void properties although to date there has been no breakdown of the budget to analyse how much this is costing. From 2009/10 financial year, the Estate Management costs will be broken down by Area Assembly area and by void/non-void properties.

- **Neighbourhood Investment Service, RMBC**

With regard to void properties, the Neighbourhood Investment Service is responsible for providing 'landlord' advice, support and direction to 2010 Ltd on investment decisions regarding non-traditional housing stock, any void property which exceeds a total investment cost of £20,000 and unsustainable housing stock, and managing demolition and regeneration programmes.

- **Cabinet Member, Economic Development, Planning and Transportation**

If repair work on a void property is estimated to cost more than £20,000, it must be authorised by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation.

2.4 Bidding for properties

Under the Key Choices Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system which has been in place in Rotherham since June 2005, tenants can exercise a right to choose a council property that they wish to live in. In reality, demand outweighs supply of Council owned dwellings and so in order to increase housing options, the Housing Options team advertise Housing Association properties and private rented properties managed by the Council's Key Choices Property Management Service on behalf of the landlord.

In relation to voids, CBL could potentially have a positive impact in highlighting to prospective tenants that if they bid for properties which are less desirable (due to their size or location) they have a much greater chance of success.

A separate scrutiny review is currently underway looking at the Choice Based Lettings process and it is hoped that implementation of its recommendations will help to improve the system and have a positive effect on the voids management process. Emerging issues of the CBL review which impact on voids include a need for more consistency in the information provided on adverts for properties, communication between teams in 2010 Rotherham Ltd and Key Choices and provision of information to Elected Members.

2.5 Repairs

There is an Empty Homes lettable standard and associated cleaning standard, both of which were agreed by the Empty Homes Service Improvement Group. Tenants are currently offered a copy of these when they move into a property as part of their Houseproud bucket which is filled with cleaning products.

Rotherham 2010 Ltd identified delays in the time taken to carry out repairs as the main reason behind the underperformance against LPI 212 (Average Re-let Times). In June 2008 a restructure of the Voids repair team took place so that instead of three pre-let and three post-let repair champions covering three geographical areas

there are now six Repairs Champions covering six geographical areas. The average re-let times have improved significantly since June 2008 and the new team structure means that less time is spent travelling between repair jobs.

The Repairs Champions carry out the termination inspections before a property becomes vacant and where possible carry out repairs during the 28 day notice period whilst the outgoing tenant is still in the property.

In order to address the backlog of empty properties needing repairs in 2008, some properties were passed to the Decent Homes teams who brought them up to the Decent Homes standard. In these cases, the Decent Homes work was paid for from their budget and general empty property repairs were charged to the empty homes budget.

2.6 Long-term voids

There are some properties in the borough that have been empty for a number of years, either because they are undesirable to bidders, in need of significant investment to bring them up to a lettable standard, or awaiting a decision about possible demolition. Long-term voids result in a considerable loss of rent for the Council; it is calculated that £96,733.81 was lost in rent in 2008/9 on properties that are pending a decision regarding investment or change of use.

If repairs needed on a property are estimated to cost more than £20,000, 2010 Rotherham Ltd refer the property to the Neighbourhood Investment Service who will evaluate the options and submit a report to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhood Services who will approve either investment, sale of the property or demolition. This process currently takes around 8 weeks. 2010 Rotherham Ltd have recommended in their recent review of the voids service that when a property is referred to the Neighbourhood Investment Service, a clear target date is agreed for a decision to be made. They have also recommended that consideration be given to increasing the threshold from £20,000 to £25,000 before referral to the Neighbourhood Investment Service is required.

2.7 Budget

The budget for empty homes for 2008/9 was £3.7 million split between £1.5million Capital and £2.2 million Revenue which was to cover all works undertaken to vacant properties.

The budget has increased by £450,000 for 2009/10 with £1.5million Capital and £2.5 million Revenue and an additional £100k for damp proofing and £50k for structural works.

2.8 Performance

The 2008 Audit Commission report into 2010 Rotherham Ltd reported that with regards to void properties,

“....strengths outweigh weaknesses. An integrated voids team manages empty homes effectively. Performance is high on re-letting empty homes quickly. Procedures are customer focused. Too many empty properties have security grilles however, and the repair standard is not clear to new tenants.”

Performance on empty properties is measured by Local Performance Indicator (LPI) 212 which records how long it takes for an empty property to be re-let. The target for 2008/9 was an average turnaround time of 23 days, and this was not met as the actual cumulative average was 39.45 days. However if the figures are broken down, significant progress was made during 2008/9 to reduce the average re-let time from 66.78 days in the first quarter to 24.54 days in the final quarter. The target for this year 2009/10 remains at 23 days. Current performance for re-let times is 26.35 days for April 2009 and 24.01 days for May 2009.

The void turnaround time also impacts on other performance indicators, including:

- Rent loss through voids (LPI 69)
- Percentage of tenancies not lasting 12 months.
- Number of households living in temporary accommodation (NI 156)

3/ FINDINGS

3.1 The Choice Based Lettings process

The review identified that there is a need for a clearer understanding about how the bidding process in Choice Based Letting works. There is anecdotal evidence showing that many people believe they have to be seen to be actively bidding in order to have a greater chance of getting a property. This means that some people are regularly bidding for properties that they do not want, believing that this will improve their chances of success when a property they do want becomes available.

These 'wasted' bids are slowing down the allocations process. In fact, analysis for 2007/8 showed that 28.1% of people who were offered a property refused to move and the four main reasons given for refusal were:

1. No wish to move
2. Not desired location
3. Property too small
4. Refused to view

Prior to the new allocation policy taking effect in December 2008, the assessment team "matched" applicants to properties and this contributed to the higher refusal rates. There are also customers who may have had no intention for moving house in the first place or who would have benefitted from having more information available to them at the bidding stage in order to make a properly informed decision about whether the property was suitable for them.

A discussion took place at the scrutiny meeting on 16th April 2009 about whether people bidding on properties that they did not want ought to be penalised in some way, but it was felt that this would be contrary to the Code of Guidance in allocations and that what is needed is for customers to have a better understanding of how the bidding system works.

It appears that there is currently duplication of effort in the allocations process between the Key Choices team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd. As set out in section 2.4, Key Choices are responsible for collating a list of the top 30 bidders for each property and sending this list through to 2010 Rotherham Ltd who verify the eligibility of customers for that property. On occasions, due to the high percentage of customers with Priority needs and to 'wasted' bids, a large number of applicants will not be eligible and 2010 Rotherham Ltd must work their way down the list of names before finding someone who could take the property. Delays between the shortlists being

drawn up and the applicants being contacted also mean that customers have sometimes already been rehoused or changed their minds. This does not seem to be the most efficient way of allocating properties and there are clear frustrations between the two teams.

On occasions there have been long delays between Key Choices submitting a shortlist to 2010 Rotherham Ltd and applicants being informed that they are to be offered a property.

3.2 Carrying out repairs

If the Repairs Champion considers the standard of decorating in a property to be unsatisfactory, vouchers up to the value of £25 per room will be offered to the new tenants and included in the property advert. The scrutiny working group has questioned whether this amount is sufficient and anecdotal evidence suggests that the vouchers are not always issued immediately. The Audit Commission report (2008) found that there was no clear approach to awarding decorating allowances and the review group recommends that clear criteria are published setting out the conditions under which a decorating allowance will be given to ensure transparency.

During the review, questions were raised about the costs of putting metal screens on empty properties and whether, due to the high costs of hiring screens and rent loss, it would be more economically viable to have the repairs carried out by sub-contractors. This does happen to some extent already, but could probably be looked into in more detail. The Audit Commission report into 2010 Rotherham Ltd in 2008 concluded that screens are being used too frequently giving a negative impression to prospective tenants and affecting the appearance of neighbourhoods. They found that around 40 per cent of short-term voids and most long-term voids have steel shutters. As a direct result of the Audit Commission recommendation, 2010 introduced a new procedure for securing empty properties and re-tendered the grilling contract. Each void is now made secure dependant on the area and known issues and alternatives to metal screens are considered including alarms, net curtains and clear polymer screens.

3.3 Sheltered and Medical Priority properties

The allocation of sheltered, aged persons and adapted properties contributes to the delay in reletting empty properties because these homes are harder to let. This is because customers must be assessed to confirm if they meet the criteria for the property they have bid for. Many applicants do not meet the criteria set out in the Allocations Policy.

Previously only over 55s on the housing register and classified as "priority" due to disabilities or other extra needs could apply for sheltered housing. However on 24th September 2008, 2010 Rotherham Ltd were instructed to a change in policy allowing over 55s without priority needs to be offered "sheltered" properties if no sheltered matches could be found, as long as the tenants were willing to pay the £8/week service charge attached to the sheltered housing (even though they did not require the service). As a result 51 "sheltered" properties with a total of 8344 days void between them were let to over 55s.

3.4 Improving Performance

The *Voids Performance Recovery Plan* produced in July 2008 listed 25 actions to address the issues which were thought to have contributed to the poor performance, including:

- Communication problems and lack of ownership between Voids Team and Neighbourhood Team
- Insufficient staff resources to carry out repairs
- Key Choices process takes 24 days
- No analysis of termination reasons undertaken.

The actions should have all been completed by March 2009, however some of these issues have not been resolved and are still listed as areas for improvement in the recent 2010 review into Empty Homes, "Every Day Counts". Outstanding areas for improvement have been incorporated into the Empty Homes Review Action Plan with target dates and an identified lead person or team. Performance will need to be monitored against the listed actions and Members kept informed of progress.

For 2009-10, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will report more detailed figures on voids, including a breakdown of long-term voids and properties that are with the Neighbourhood Investment Service pending a decision. This will give a much clearer picture of the voids situation and help to identify any reasons for delays in reletting properties.

3.5 Customer Satisfaction

Turnaround figures are only one part of the story and there is a balance to be found between minimising the time that a property is empty and making sure that the property is repaired to a satisfactory standard and is right for the tenant.

Tenants are now given 48 hours after a viewing to consider whether or not they wish to accept the property. Previously they were expected to sign up immediately. Although this adds two days on to the void turnaround time, failed tenancies (those lasting less than 12 months) have fallen from 13% to 5%.

4 / LOOKING AT GOOD PRACTICE ELSEWHERE

It is useful to look at what other ALMOs are doing in comparison to 2010 Rotherham Ltd. Sandwell Homes, Solihull Community Housing and Homes for Islington were all recently rated as excellent by the Audit Commission and below is an outline of the voids service they offer.

Sandwell Homes was inspected by the Audit Commission in November 2008 and was classed as "excellent" with "excellent" prospects for improvement. They have a clear void standard developed with tenants and provide tenants with an empty property standard setting out how the property is to be left. A reward scheme is being piloted which pays tenants £100 if they leave the property clean with no rechargeable repairs and no rent arrears.

Empty homes are repaired quickly and re-let in an average of 27 days. There are clear targets for each stage of the void process and tracking systems in place to

monitor the progress of voids as well as clarity about the inclusion of decent homes improvements in empty properties.

There were however some areas of the voids process which were criticised including: Monitoring customer satisfaction, and arrangements for outgoing tenants not yet being fully implemented.

Solihull Community Housing (ALMO) currently re-lets properties within an average of 24 days (their target is 28 days). They rarely use screens to protect empty properties, instead favouring portable alarm systems where necessary so as to make sure the properties remain attractive to prospective tenants. They rank empty properties as gold, silver or bronze to prioritise repairs, based on the property's likely lettable standard. Their lettable standard is however criticised for being too basic and tenants often have to carry out decorating themselves.

Homes for Islington has an average turnaround time for voids of 22 days (2007/8). They provide a high quality welcome box for new tenants to establish a positive relationship with them. They have an incentive scheme which pays £150 to tenants leaving the property to a specified standard, and estimate that the scheme has saved £10,000 a year after costs. Tenants whose property does not reach this standard can be charged up to £290. Tenants benefit from gas and electricity being connected for them prior to moving in.

5 / WITNESSES AND THANKS

1. Cllr Akhtar Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods
2. Kevin Lowry Chief Executive 2010 Rotherham Ltd
3. Adrian Cheetham Voids Manager, 2010 Rotherham Ltd
4. Sandra Tolley Housing Choices Manager, Key Choices, RMBC
5. Sandra Wardle Housing Options Manager, Key Choices, RMBC
6. Phil Syrat Housing Options Co-ordinator, Key Choices, RMBC
7. Catherine Dale Neighbourhood Initiatives Manager, RMBC
8. Diane Green Assessment Manager, Neighbourhoods, RMBC
(regarding allocation of medical priority housing)
9. Paul Walsh Programme Manager, Neighbourhood Investment Service, RMBC
(regarding investment in long-term voids)

Corporate Management Team's Commentary on Scrutiny Review of Void Turnaround Times

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication	
1. That improvements are made to the CBL process in line with the recommendations of the current scrutiny review.	Progress against the CBL scrutiny review recommendations is reported in a separate report	Various	Rotherham Safe Housing Strategy Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011	See response to CBL scrutiny review	See response to CBL scrutiny review	
2. That the verification process is made more efficient by screening out ineligible bids at an earlier stage.	Anite IT system updated to include verification module	Complete	Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011	Benefit: Reduced duplication	Budget identified and upgrade already completed	
3. That clear criteria are published about the circumstances in which decorating vouchers will be issued to new tenants and that the allowance of £25 per room is reviewed.	Clear information about decoration allowance available on 2010 Rotherham Ltd website. 2010 Rotherham Ltd to review decoration allowance.	December 09	2010 Rotherham Ltd's decoration policy	Benefit: Opportunity to ensure consistent approach taken whenever decoration vouchers are to be issued	Financial implications to be assessed as part of the review	
4. That in line with good practice demonstrated by high-performing ALMOs, consideration is given to a reward scheme to encourage tenants to leave properties in good condition.	2010 Rotherham Ltd is piloting a 'fond farewell' scheme, which incentivises tenants to leave their home and garden in a good condition	January 2010	2010 Rotherham Ltd's service standards	Benefit: Properties left in good condition will improve turnaround times	Tenants receive £100 as a reward for leaving the property in a good condition – cost met within 2010's existing resources. Cost	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication	
					/ benefit evaluation to be completed in January 2010.	
5. That information is provided to Elected Members on a regular basis on the void properties in their ward including reasons why a property is empty and when it is expected to be re-let.	<p>2010 Rotherham Ltd's Neighbourhood Champions produce a weekly estate management update to Ward Members, and this now includes information about empty properties.</p> <p>Additionally, the Empty Homes Team provides neighbourhood staff with a monthly update for every empty property, stating the estimated completion date and / or reasons for delay.</p>	Ongoing	Empty Homes Strategy	Benefit: Members are provided with clear information about empty properties in their areas, allowing them to provide accurate information to members of the public and to challenge poor performance.	N/A	
6. That more detailed information is provided when reporting on voids to give a clearer picture of why properties are empty and the financial implications.	<p>As above</p> <p>A joint working group has been established that includes officers from RMBC's Neighbourhood Investment Service, to jointly review properties that have been empty for over 16 weeks. The financial implications are measured by the amount of potential rent lost through properties being left empty.</p>	Ongoing	<p>Empty Homes Strategy</p> <p>Housing Strategy</p>	Benefit: Clearer understanding of reasons why properties are empty, leading to identified actions and improved performance.	N/A	

Scrutiny recommendation	Proposed action/ comment	Target date	Link to Themes/ Strategies	Impact Analysis		CMT recommendation to Cabinet
				Benefit/ Risk	Cost implication	
7. That action taken towards the recommendations of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's empty homes service review 'every day counts' (April 2009) be monitored and reported back to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in due course.	<p>12 of the 16 recommendations within the action plan are either complete or mostly complete. Outstanding items:</p> <p>Review 'incentives to stay' in order to reduce the number of tenancy terminations received</p> <p>Review decoration allowance – see recommendation 3 above</p> <p>Review all new procedures</p> <p>Review the process of backdating tenancy commencement dates</p>	<p>April 2010</p> <p>November 2009-11-06</p> <p>December 2009-11-06</p> <p>October 2010</p>	<p>Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2008-2011</p> <p>2010 Rotherham Ltd procedures and service standards</p>	<p>Benefits:</p> <p>Reduced homelessness</p> <p>Consistent approach to decoration allowance</p> <p>Clear and up-to-date procedures in place</p>	<p>Within existing resources</p>	

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:	Monday 30th November 2009
3.	Title:	Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to 30th September 2009
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Social Services

5. Summary

Based on performance to the end of September 2009, the HRA is projected to outturn with a surplus of £1.66m (3% variance from gross budget) by the end of March 2010. Within this, there are a number of variances explanations for which are detailed in the report.

6. Recommendations

THAT THE CABINET MEMBER RECEIVES AND NOTES THIS REPORT

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 The key variances and management actions are identified below and summarised in the Operating Statement in Appendix 1.

7.2 Supervision & Management Costs

The outturn is forecast to be an overspend of £417k and principally relates to the expansion of Rotherham Furnished Homes Scheme and is mainly offset by increased income increased income in Non Dwelling Rents (£376k), the balance being related to expenditure incurred by area assemblies.

7.3 Negative Subsidy to Government

The original budget was based on the draft determination issued in November 2008. This assumed that Rotherham would pay £578k to the Government in negative subsidy however subsequent changes to the guidance were issued as a result of the prevailing economic conditions which allowed Rotherham to take advantage of increased subsidy in return for a reduction in the proposed rent increase. This has altered Rotherham's position by £2.328m to a positive subsidy receivable of £1.846m. ie This change resulted in Rotherham moving from being a payer to the national pool to being a recipient of funding from the pool.

7.4 Depreciation of Fixed Assets

The depreciation charged to the HRA is forecasted to be £529k less than the budget of £19.800m which has remained static from 2008/09.

7.5 Repairs and Maintenance

2010 Ltd are currently projecting a balanced budget with robust management actions in place to deliver this.

7.6 Income

Dwelling Rent Income is forecasted to be below budget by £1.506m. This is mainly due to the original budget being set with an assumed rent increase of 6.9%. The Government subsequently allowed Rotherham to reduce this to increase to 3.6% due to the prevailing economic conditions in return for additional subsidy benefit which will offset this loss.

This variance has been offset by the forecasted rent loss due to voids and other losses and refunds being less than budget by (£357k).

Non Dwelling Rent Income primarily relates to the expansion of Rotherham Furnished Homes Scheme, which is referred to in section 7.2.

8. Finance

The Financial implications have been discussed in section 7 above.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The key risk centres on repairs and maintenance budgets, in managing any potential overspend on responsive repairs

The potential to charge the HRA for up to £1.008m of costs relating to the externalisation of the repairs and maintenance service.

The financial projections also assume that there will be no significant change in the consolidated rate of interest for capital borrowing.

The projections are made on the basis of information received from the Cedar financial ledger and from discussions held with budget holders.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The CPA Resources Action plan sets out the requirements to improve the financial monitoring and reporting to members and to maintain and improve budget monitoring and control.

HRA funding is ringfenced and can only be used to provide and support services to Rotherham Council house tenants.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

HRA Budget 2009/10

The contents of this report have been discussed with the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods & Adults) and the Strategic Director of Finance.

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Housing Revenue Account - Operating Statement format

YTD Budget £	YTD Actuals £	YTD Variance £	Narrative	Full Year Budget £	Projected Out-turn £	Full Year Variance £
Income:						
-29,704,018.81	-30,025,221.14	-321,202.33	Dwelling Rents	-57,019,771.00	-55,870,556.00	1,149,215.00
-668,187.27	-861,718.18	-193,530.91) Non-dwelling Rents	-1,266,860.00	-1,642,601.00	-375,741.00
-607,141.48	-551,321.60	55,819.88) Charges for Services and facilities	-1,824,862.00	-1,810,066.00	14,796.00
-102,083.29	-66,770.44	35,312.85	Other Fees	-200,000.00	-202,765.00	-2,765.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	HRA Subsidy receivable	-13,064,502.00	-13,064,586.00	-84.00
-31,081,430.85	-31,505,031.36	-423,600.51	Income	-73,375,995.00	0.00	-72,590,574.00
Expenditure:						
7,111,543.92	4,557,865.45	-2,553,678.47	Contributions to Housing Repairs	14,477,233.00	14,477,233.00	0.00
3,538,293.74	3,281,985.22	-256,308.52	Supervision and Management	9,439,414.00	9,856,049.00	416,635.00
3,773,143.02	3,773,143.02	0.00	ALMO Management Fees	7,546,286.00	7,546,286.00	0.00
60,807.00	57,378.00	-3,429.00	Rents, Rates, Taxes etc.	121,613.00	121,613.00	0.00
288,894.00	-812,571.00	-1,101,465.00	Negative Subsidy to Government	13,642,290.00	11,313,959.00	-2,328,331.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Provision for Bad Debts	459,000.00	459,000.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Cost of capital Charge	11,957,889.00	11,957,889.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Depreciation of Fixed Assets	19,800,000.00	19,271,164.00	-528,836.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Deferred Charges	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Impairment of Fixed Assets	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Debt Management Costs	228,475.00	228,475.00	0.00
14,772,681.68	10,857,800.69	-3,914,880.99	Expenditure	77,672,200.00	0.00	75,231,668.00
-16,308,749.17	-20,647,230.67	-4,338,481.50	Net Cost of Services	4,296,205.00	0.00	2,641,094.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Amortised premia - Debt redempti	10,373.00	10,373.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Interest received	-200,000.00	-200,000.00	0.00
-16,308,749.17	-20,647,230.67	-4,338,481.50	Net Operating Expenditure	4,106,578.00	0.00	2,451,467.00
Appropriations:						
0.00	0.00	0.00	Revenue Contributions to Capital	2,100,000.00	2,100,000.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Transfer from Capital Finance Acc	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Transfer from Capital Finance Acc	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	Transfer to/from Major Repairs Re	-6,206,578.00	-6,206,578.00	0.00
-16,308,749.17	-20,647,230.67	-4,338,481.50	Surplus/Deficit for the year	0.00	0.00	-1,655,111.00

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