

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.