

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

6	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
6	Date:	26th November 2012
6	Title:	Registered Social Landlord Nomination Rights
6	Programme Area:	NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ADULT SERVICES

5. Summary

Most recently there have been some concerns raised by Members about the number of nominations Housing Associations are accepting. We have therefore had a thorough look at the processes surrounding nominations and lettings. This has been a productive exercise which has led to increased monitoring and will be updated on an annual basis.

This report details our findings, including how many RSL nominations agreements operate in Rotherham, how they are managed and a firm commitment that we will meet with Chevin Housing to ensure they comply with the nomination process in future.

6 Recommendations:

That Cabinet Member:

- **CONSIDERS THE REPORT AND PROVIDES DETAIL ON WHAT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS REQUIRED IN FUTURE REPORTS**
- **THAT AN UPDATE ON PROGRESS WILL BE SUBMITTED ANNUALLY**

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 How does the current nomination arrangement operate?

There is a formal nomination agreement in place with 17 Housing Associations who have housing stock in Rotherham. The nomination arrangement enables a single route to accessing affordable housing via one housing application made to the Council, which enables customers to be nominated to all partners. The arrangement is as follows:

- The agreement contains a clause for each RSL in the area to agree to advertise and allocate all (100%) or a percentage (at least 50%) of their properties through Key Choices single housing register. This approach to lettings makes best use of stock and ensures service excellence and consistency between providers - as far as is practicable.
- All RSL partners access Key Choices via a web based Choice based letting electronic link and each partner advertises their own properties and can seek their own shortlist; which is will be made up of applicants from the Councils' Housing Register and ordered in accordance with RMBC Housing Allocation Policy. The property will be let to a Rotherham Council's housing register applicant and once housed the application is automatically cancelled by the Abitras system.

7.2 Rotherham's approach to nomination arrangements ensures that applying for housing is simpler for applicants, with the completion of a single form which removes the need to apply to each housing provider separately. This also allows the Council to better monitor housing need and is a practical way of promoting its housing association partners whilst working with them to achieve improved communication and best practice

7.3 How did the nominations process operate prior to the new arrangements?

The following describes how the nomination process operated prior to September 2011, which is when Abritas choice based letting ICT system was introduced. The changes improved the administration procedures for staff and simplified the housing application process for customers. The nomination process was:

- The RSL provided details of 1 property for RMBC to nominate applicants to.
- Up to 3 applications were referred at any one time. These included households that had shown an interest in being nominated to a RSL.
- Ultimately the timing could have been wrong, the applicants did not know which property they would be nominated to, other applicants with earlier dates could have missed out if they were not aware that they could be nominated
- The process was lengthy and often resulted in a number of nominations being forwarded before an applicant accepted the offer.

- The Housing association also managed their own register

7.4 For 2011/2012 the overall percentages of nominations for all RSL's is 60% (RSL properties advertised in Keychoices) This information had been taken from "CORE" Annual report for 2011/2012.

7.5 The following table lists each Housing Association, shows the number of RSL lettings during 2011/2012 and the current nomination quota agreement.

RSL	Number of lettings	Nomination Percentage %	RSL	Number of lettings	Nomination Percentage %
Acis Group Ltd	18	100 %	Jephson Homes HA Ltd	2	100 %
Anchor Trust	22	50 %	Johnnie Johnson HT Ltd	84	50 %
Arches HA ltd	4	100 %	Places for People	39	50 %
Chevin HA	172	50 %	Sadeh Lok Housing Group Ltd	4	100 %
Equity Housing Group Ltd	25	100 %	Salvation Army HA Ltd	1	100 %
Great Places HA	78	100 %	Sanctuary HA	46	50 %
Guinness Northern Counties Ltd	142	50 %	South Yorkshire HA Ltd	436	100 %
Habinteg HA Ltd	5	100 %	Yorkshire Housing Ltd	16	50 %
Housing 21 HA Ltd	14	100 %	Total	2473	

Note that from March 2012 there are 10 RSLs have closed their waiting lists and they advertise the majority of their vacant properties through Keychoices. With 100% nomination agreement a small number of internal management transfers are permitted. This is in circumstances where a RSL tenant needs to be moved to an alternative property to resolve housing management difficulties or for decants where there are repair issues.

The nomination quotas can be verified by cross referencing the number of properties let on Abrisas with the number of properties recorded as let on the Core Returns.

The following table shows the results of the verification exercise of a sample of RSLs. However as we only hold data for properties let since September 2011, we have had to calculate an average. This exercise has shown that South Yorkshire Housing is slightly below the 100% agreement; however the 100% nomination agreement wasn't in place until March 2012. We cannot evidence that the 100% nomination agreement has been achieved from March 2012, until next years Core results are published. What the results

have shown is that Chevin are well below the agreed 50% agreement. This poor performance has been raised by the Empty Homes Coordinator who met with Chevin's Team leader for lettings on 1st November. RMBC have requested that for a temporary period properties advertised with Key Choices are increased to 100% until their agreed nominations quota is back up to 50%. This has also been brought to the attention of Head of Chevin's Housing. Monthly letting results have been requested and bi monthly performance review meetings have been scheduled until the end of the financial year.

Name of RSL	Number of RSL lettings made during 2011/12 recorded on CORE	Number of properties advertised on Abritas (Nominations)	Agreed percentage	Actual Percentage
South Yorkshire Housing Association	436	392	100%	90%
Sanctuary	46	26	50%	56%
Places for People	39	20	50%	51%
Yorkshire Housing	16	10	50%	62%
Chevin	172	52	50%	30%

In respect of new build where possible we have asked for 100% in perpetuity, but this has not always been agreed with every RSL. For example South Yorkshire Housing has agreed 100% in perpetuity, whereas for Guinness Northern Counties it is 100% on first let and 50/50 after.

With regards to S106 properties that Registered Providers have acquired from Developers, we normally ask that prospective tenants have a local connection to Rotherham and are registered on the Council's housing register. However as the Council doesn't make a financial or land contribution to these units it is difficult to impose nomination criteria/rights. That said, on all S106 properties we have dealt with, we get 100% nominations on the first let from all Housing Associations. (E.g. Barratts at Springfields, Bramley, Wakefield District Homes at the Wickets at Upper Haugh).

7.6 How does RMBC manage nomination performance?

The Empty Homes CBL Coordinator holds regular meetings with RSLs. The purpose is to discuss the number of properties advertised through Key Choices, iron out issues, address any training needs, and organise subsequent training. There have been no formal disputes raised by any individual RSL. The meetings have been positive and provided an opportunity to improve communication and portray the advantages of this approach. These meeting have had positive results with South Yorkshire Housing Association agreeing to close their waiting list so that they advertise all their stock with Key Choices.

7.7 Information for applicants on the Key Choices website enables housing applicants to make more informed choices about other housing options
There are significant benefits, which include:

- Developing a simple process - only one application form;
- Helping to reduce voids and improve cash flow for RSLs as the advertising process is much quicker than the old nomination methods;
- Reducing operating costs for partners and RMBC;
- Providing transparency to all stakeholders.
- Allows easier checking of an applicant's status on existing lists, and makes it easier for people to apply for all social housing options in one go.

7.8 Key Choices have received no negative feedback from customers in respect of customer care issues, in fact quite the opposite. Below are 2 case studied where 2 separate Housing Associations have worked in partnership with Key Choices to resolve applicants housing situation.

Case Study 1 – RSL 1

There was close liaison with one particular RSL and Sandra Wardle where we needed to protect the identity of an applicant. Two RSL staff, which included one senior manager, assisted in re-housing a vulnerable applicant. Confidentiality was retained throughout, and both RSL and RMBC agreed that re-housing of this applicant was an excellent example of joint working.

Case Study 2 – RSL 2

There was close liaison with one particular housing association, in re-housing a victim of domestic violence. The victim was planning to leave her home and partner (perpetrator) with her children but would leave with no possessions. The Housing Association arranged for furniture belonging to (but no longer required) by the outgoing tenant to remain at the property. The items included; carpets throughout, cooker/oven, washer, microwave, a shed and a children's slide. This family were really appreciative that the RSL had helped in giving them a safe and new start in life.

8. Finance

8.1 By other landlords promoting and advertising their own properties within a single, simplified administrative process reduces costs for both the partner and RMBC. For the latter this has reduced staff time taken to advertise RSLs vacant properties processing shortlists and imputing of data.

8.2 Increasing awareness of available homes has reduced the number of households who have been accepted as homeless awaiting permanent rehousing. This is ultimately a cost saving to the Council as it has allowed a reduction in numbers of temporary units of accommodation currently needed.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

9.1 Any nomination process must ensure that the needs of vulnerable and hard to reach groups are addressed, and the Council's statutory obligations

are met. The arrangements must be delivered in a transparent way to ensure they are fair, and seen to be fair.

10. Policy and performance agenda implications

- Corporate Plan – Making sure no community is left behind
- Housing Strategy
 - Commitment 2, we will ensure our Council housing meets the needs of the people of Rotherham
 - Commitment 6, we will help people to access the housing related support they need, particularly people in financial hardship and at risk of homelessness, and
 - Commitment 8, we will help people in Rotherham's most disadvantaged communities
- Housing Act 1996, Parts VI and VII
- Homelessness Act, 2002
- Homelessness Strategy

11. Background papers and consultation

- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Housing Allocations Policy,
- Nomination Agreement

12. Contact details

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