

<b>REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE</b>		Report No. 10
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> January 2008	
<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Policy</b>	
<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Housing</b>	
Link to Corporate Priorities	Housing	
Key Decision	Yes - The decision will be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area compassing two or more wards within the district of North Wiltshire.	
Executive Workplan Ref	B376	
Public Report	Yes	

### Summary of Report

To present the new countywide Choice Based Lettings Policy “Homes 4 Wiltshire” and to ask the Executive for approval to implement it. The full policy document is attached (Appendix A).

### Officer Recommendations

#### That the Executive:

- 1) **Approve the new Homes 4 Wiltshire Choice Based Lettings Policy and support its implementation within existing budgets.**
- 2) **Delegate authority to the Housing Manager to authorise any minor changes to the Policy.**

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The report seeks the Executive's approval for the Homes 4 Wiltshire Choice Based Lettings Policy and their support for its implementation. (Full policy document attached at Appendix 1)

## 2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1 To approve the Homes 4 Wiltshire Choice Based Lettings Policy.
- 2.2 Refusal to approve the Policy will be in contravention of the Communities and Local Government's Code of Guidance regarding allocation of affordable housing.

## 3. Background Information

- 3.1 North Wiltshire's Allocations policy was revised in December 2005. It is still based on a points system and offers applicants only a limited amount of choice.
- 3.2 The Government requires Local Authorities to offer people more choice in where they want to live and have introduced a target to introduce Choice Based Lettings by 2010 and to extend this on a sub-regional basis thereby giving people even greater mobility.
- 3.3 Since 2003 the Housing Team have been involved in a working group investigating the feasibility of a sub regional choice based lettings scheme. Since then work has been undertaken to draft a countywide policy, consult with customers, Members and stakeholders, specify IT requirements and apply for funding from CLG to take the project forward.

### 3.4 The Homes 4 Wiltshire Partnership

Homes 4 Wiltshire will be operating with the 28 housing association partners listed below

Anchor Housing Association	New Downland Housing Association
Bromford Housing Group	Orbit Housing Association
Gloucestershire Housing Association	Raglan Housing Association
English Churches Housing Group	Sanctuary Housing Association
Guinness Trust Housing Association	Sarsen Housing Association
Hastoe Housing Association	Somer Community Housing Trust
Housing 21 Housing Association	Shaftesbury Housing Association
James Butcher Housing Association	South Western Co-operative Housing
Jephson Housing Association	Sovereign Housing Association
Kennet Action for Single Homeless	Warden Housing Association
Kingfisher Housing Association	Westlea Housing Association
Kennet Housing Association	Western Challenge Housing Association
Knightstone Housing Association	West Wiltshire Housing Society
L & Q Beacon	Wiltshire Rural Housing Association

### **3.5 Key Objectives**

To set up joint services which will improve the experience for our customers, currently 16,000 households between the four districts, simplifying the application process, widening the choice of properties beyond district boundaries and providing seamless access to one housing register across a wide geographical area with the same eligibility, prioritising and shortlisting criteria.

To simplify processes and procedures for landlord organisations advertising their vacancies so that it does not matter which local authority area is involved, the procedures and lettings policy will be the same.

To take full advantage of the economies of scale available through joint commissioning and procurement of services to generate savings to reinvest in service improvement.

### **3.6 Summary of the Scheme**

- 3.6.1 The key objectives of the scheme are to increase customer choice and mobility and to provide a transparent and easy to understand method of accessing available properties in the region. There will be one lettings policy for the whole area.
- 3.6.2 Currently only 2 of the Districts operate Choice Based Lettings. This scheme will give every customer the opportunity to bid for available properties across the County. All available properties will be advertised as widely as possible and customers will have a range of bidding methods open to them. Homeless applicants will be given the same opportunities to bid as all other customers.
- 3.6.3 It is not proposed to pilot this scheme in any particular area. However, it is likely, due to their previous experience that West Wiltshire and Kennet District Councils will be in a position to proceed before North Wiltshire and Salisbury.
- 3.6.4 It is proposed that both shared ownership and low cost home ownership will be included in the scheme. Two HomeBuy agents are our partners within the sub region and close working will be actively encouraged.
- 3.6.5 The scheme will take a housing options approach to Choice Based Lettings and, as such will also include the private rented sector. All the District Councils have active Landlords forums and have developed good relationships with private landlords.
- 3.6.6 Three of the partners have common housing registers in their individual Districts but it is envisaged that our scheme will have one common housing register for the whole Wiltshire county area, work has already begun on a common application form.
- 3.6.7 All partners have undertaken extensive consultation with everyone on our housing registers and this has shown that the numbers of people wanting to move in and out of particular districts is about equal. Therefore we do not propose to introduce a quota system. Some priority will still be given for local connection but it will be for local connection with the Wiltshire county area rather than a District. Local connection criteria for village properties will still apply where subject to existing S106 planning restrictions.
- 3.6.8 The expertise of Kennet and West Wiltshire will be shared to provide appropriate support for people who may be disadvantaged by choice based lettings. A joint policy will be in place to assist with identifying these households and enabling them to participate.

## **4 Timescales for Implementation**

- 4.1 Kennet, West Wiltshire and Salisbury hope to implement the Homes 4 Wiltshire policy in September 2008, North Wiltshire hopes to launch this between January and March 2009. (See attached Project Plan – Appendix 2).
- 4.2 Westlea Housing Association currently manage the Housing Register on behalf of the District Council at a cost of £54,110 per annum. They will be given 12 months notice that the contract will be terminating in early 2008

## **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The sub regional choice based lettings group has been successful in its bid to CLG to fund this project with a grant of £128,000. This will provide the necessary funding for IT, publicity and the initial implementation of the scheme (Full costing attached at Appendix 3).
- 5.2 It is anticipated that ongoing costs will be met from the existing budget of £54,000 with a potential for savings in future years through economies of scale and the increase in online advertising and bidding

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 In 2007 the Government brought out a draft Code of Guidance for Local Authorities' choice based lettings schemes which asked authorities to ensure that different levels of need were taken into account and that cumulative need was recognised within the allocations policy. The Homes 4 Wiltshire policy will adhere to all Government guidance.

## **7. Community & Environmental Implications**

- 7.1 The Homes 4 Wiltshire policy will ensure that people have a clearer and more understandable way to access housing throughout the county.

## **8. Human Resources Implications**

- 8.1 It is possible that up to 3 Officers employed by Westlea Housing Association will have the protection of TUPE regulations when the Housing Register contract is terminated.
- 8.2 The grant from the CLG includes the cost of employing a choice based lettings co-ordinator for one year

## **9. Equality & Diversity Implications**

- 9.1 The policy will be supported by a procedure which will ensure that vulnerable applicants are identified at the initial application stage.

## 10. Risk Analysis

### 10.1 Cost of Advertising across all Districts

The risk is small providing we use alternative outlets in place of advertising in multiple newspapers. (There is no single paper covering the county) Work is ongoing as to what options are available, for example sending the property list to various agencies, leisure centres and supermarkets for applicants to access information. Financial support has been pledged by housing associations in the Homes 4 Wiltshire partnership with their continued agreement to pay a fee for advertising each vacant property.

### 10.2 Increased number of applicants wanting to move to the North Wiltshire District.

The risk is small as research has been carried out into the number of people wanting to move in or out of each district and the numbers were even across all districts. Questionnaire outcome attached (Appendix 4).

<b>Appendices:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Homes 4 Wiltshire Draft Allocations policy</li><li>2. Project Timeline</li><li>3. Cost Analysis</li><li>4. Consultation Feedback</li></ol>
<b>Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Code of Guidance Allocations and Choice based Lettings</li></ul>

#### Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>		