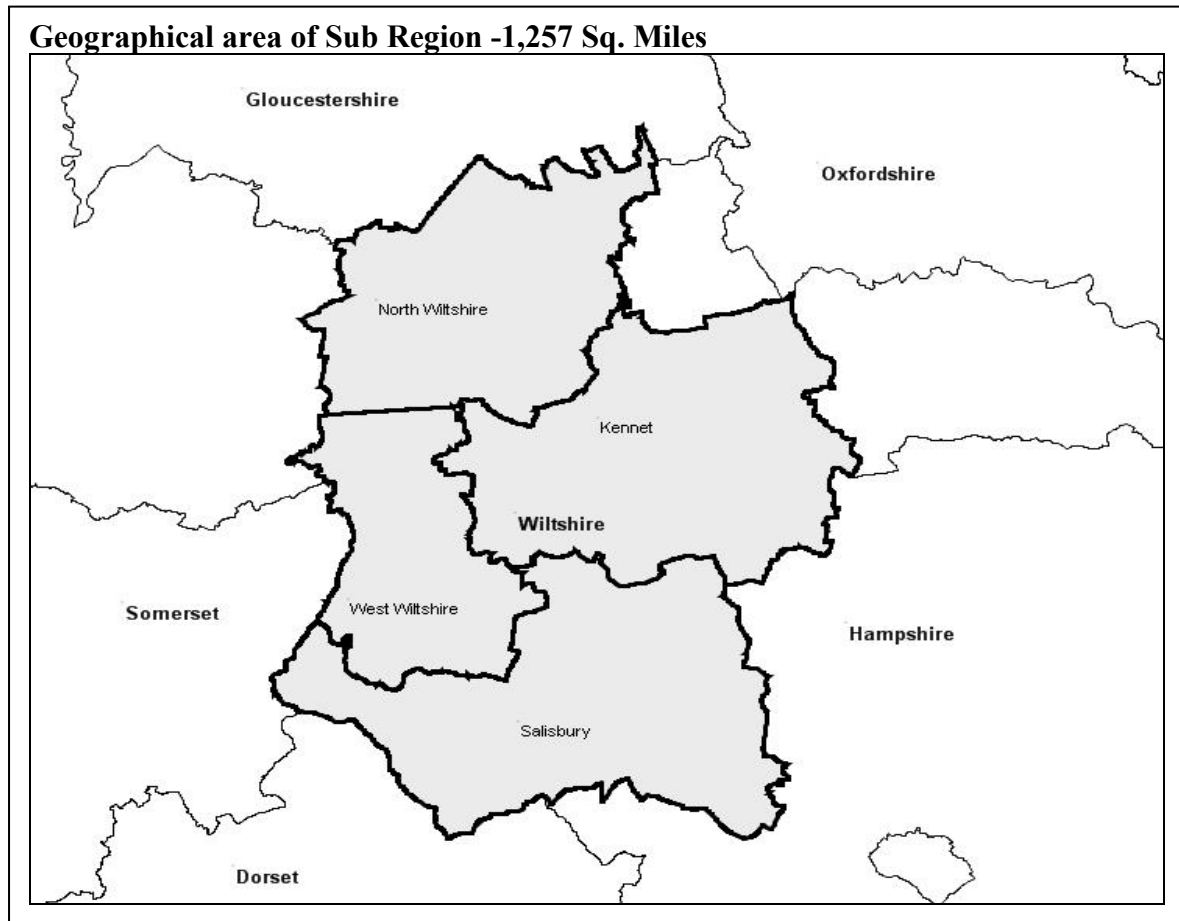


**PROPOSAL FOR FUNDING OF A SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE  
BASED LETTINGS SCHEME**

**HOMES 4 WILTSHIRE**



**KENNET DC  
NORTH WILTSHIRE DC  
SALISBURY DC  
WEST WILTSHIRE DC  
30 RSL PARTNERS**

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## KEY OBJECTIVES

**1. To set up joint services which will improve the experience for our customers, currently 14,000 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.**

**2. 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.**

**3. 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.**

### **A Indicate the local authority to whom the grant funding would be made payable.**

Kennet District Council. HSBC Branch Devizes Sort code 40 19 16 Account 81193198  
Contact Belinda Eastland, Housing Options Manager. 01380 734646,  
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### **B List the landlord partners to the scheme.**

- Kennet District Council
- West Wiltshire District Council
- North Wiltshire District Council
- Salisbury District Council
- 

### **RSL Partners (30)**

Sarsen Housing Association (HomeBuy Agent “New Futures” Kennet, North Wilts & West Wilts.)	L & Q Beacon
Knightstone HA (HomeBuy agent “MyPlace” Salisbury DC)	New Downland Housing Association
Anchor Housing Association	Orbit Housing Association
Bromford Housing Group	Raglan Housing Association
Gloucestershire Housing Association	Sanctuary Housing Association
English Churches Housing Group	Sarsen Housing Association (Home buy Agent)
Guinness Trust Housing Association	Somer Community Housing Trust
Hastoe Housing Association	Shaftesbury Housing Association
Housing 21 Housing Association	South Western Co-operative Housing
James Butcher Housing Association	Sovereign Housing Association
Jephson Housing Association	Warden Housing Association
Kennet Action for Single Homeless	Westlea Housing Association
Kingfisher Housing Association	Western Challenge Housing Association
Kennet Housing Association	West Wiltshire Housing Society
Knightstone Housing Association	Wiltshire Rural Housing Association

**C List separately any other partners to the scheme**

Abritas Software Solutions – IT Provider working with the partnerships specification.

**D Indicate which partners currently operate choice based lettings systems and describe those schemes.**

West Wiltshire District Council operates a CBL system hosted by Abritas, incorporating four bands. Shortlisting for accommodation is based on the highest band and the longest waiting time. Eligibility criteria for property types ensures people can bid for properties that suit their household size. RSLs take responsibility for their own vacancies by advertising and shortlisting themselves, this is overseen by the Council.

Kennet District Council was a pilot area for choice based lettings and developed its Homes@Kennet service for the Kennet Housing Partnership as one of the first CBL schemes in the country. The CBL service has been in operation for five years. As a pilot authority Homes@Kennet won the UK Housing Award for Outstanding Achievement in 2003. Homes@Kennet is a comprehensive service covering all social rented vacancies as well as home ownership and private renting. The scheme has three bands and currently uses a priority card system. RSLs upload their property vacancies on to the IBS computer system through the website. The Council oversees the advertising process and then carries out the shortlisting process for RSLs. Registered customers can bid for as many properties as they wish each week as long as they can match what the advert asks for.

**E List other landlords which are not partners but have indicated willingness to participate in the proposed scheme**

Swindon Borough Council is not currently a partner but has indicated that at a later date it would like to join up with the homes 4 wiltshire choice based lettings scheme.

**F Indicate the proportion of stock to be included in the scheme**

75 – 100% of all affordable housing stock in the sub region

**G Describe the scheme for which you are seeking support**

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 sub region. There will be one lettings policy for the whole area.
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. 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.

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 relationships are already established.
5. The proposed scheme will take a housing options approach to Choice Based Lettings and, as such will also include plans to increase participation by private sector landlords. All the District Councils have active Landlords forums and have developed a good relationship with private landlords through rent deposit schemes. This foundation will be built on so that eventually households will be able to bid for private lets along side housing association ones if they choose to.
6. A housing options approach to CBL is currently operating in both West Wiltshire and Kennet and this will be rolled out as part of the sub regional scheme. We will therefore be looking not only at affordable rented properties but also considering private lets, low cost home ownership, shared ownership and mutual exchanges as part of the system. A way to offer choice to those requiring supported housing will also be explored. A major supported housing provider in the county has highly praised choice based lettings and is keen to see it extended across the region. The software we purchase will have the ability to advertise all of these options on the system.
7. 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 sub region; work has already begun on a common application form.
8. West Wiltshire DC and Kennet District Council has an additional application form which is helpful for people with learning disabilities and visual impairments. Customers also have the ability to apply for housing on-line which makes it more accessible, this is something we would have as part of our county-wide system. The housing register will also be open to anyone and can be accessed via a website which will enable customers to increase font size and/or access the Browsealoud facility. Community 4, the floating housing support agency for Wiltshire is extremely keen for the CBL scheme to spread across the whole region based on the positive outcomes for their clients experienced in the Kennet and West Wiltshire districts.
9. All partners are currently working on a common allocation policy which will be adopted across the region.
10. 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 sub region rather than a District. Local connection criteria when advertising village properties will still apply where subject to existing S106 planning restrictions.

11. The expertise of Kennet and West Wiltshire will be shared to provide appropriate support for people who may be disadvantaged by CBL. A joint vulnerable persons policy will be in place to assist with identifying these households and enabling them to participate.
12. A vital requirement of any software we purchase will be the ability to monitor the new scheme closely. We would envisage that this would be an ongoing role for each of the partners and for the Choice Based Lettings Officers Group.
13. Discussions have started regarding the development of a sub regional housing strategy; the proposed CBL scheme will cover the same area and will help to ensure a consistency in policy, procedure and practice.

## **H Approval for the Scheme and Consultation**

A member consultation has taken place by post and a face to face consultation with member champions from each region has also been held. The proposed scheme does have “in principle” agreement from the housing member/champions in all partner Local Authorities. All four districts are taking the proposal to their relevant committees in December 07 for formal approval.

A major consultation has also already taken place across all four districts which has involved face to face consultation at open days across the region. It also involved sending 14,000 questionnaires to all households on four housing registers across the region. Salisbury DC also consulted with its 5387 tenants as that district still holds its own housing stock. An astounding 100% of all homeless customers in the Salisbury district were in favour of the introduction of choice based lettings. Through the South Wiltshire Multi-agency Housing Partnership we consulted, SWAN (South Wiltshire Advocacy Network), CAB, Wiltshire Racial Equality, Action for Blind People, Mental Health, Rethink, BADAS/ADAS, Adult Care, Occupational therapist, connexions, LPSA and Probation . Community 4 (floating housing support agency) and Alabare (supported housing provider) have also been consulted and wish to see choice given to their clients because in their experience “*it is quicker, easier to understand and gives them a real input into finding a home*”. Consultation will continue to take place with these agencies through the design and implementation stages as well as after launch at monitoring stage.

***The consultation results are summarised in the graphs and charts of Appendix C.***

## **I Sharing Good Practice**

Kennet District Council has supported other organisations switching to CBL and has offered advice on start-up and good practice. It has also provided guest speakers at CBL events across England and Wales including CIH and Government office. West Wiltshire District Council has also provided guidance and assistance to a number local authorities and their success recognised when they were invited to speak at a Choice Based Lettings conference lead by the ODPM in May 2005 to share their good practice. The Homes 4 Wiltshire scheme would have the expertise to become a centre of excellence and information sharing for the housing sector in relation to CBL.

## **J Outline Timetable/Project Plan**

*Please refer to Appendix A*

## **K Details of Costing and Funding Applied For from CLG**

*Please refer to Appendix B*

### **Why are there exceptional circumstances to justify the additional funding?**

We believe there are exceptional circumstances in our proposal to justify the amount of funding applied for which exceeds the general guide of £100,000. These are:-

The geographical size of the district being 1,257 square miles.

14,000 households on one common housing register living in market towns and scattered villages with rural accessibility challenges to overcome.

All four districts use different IT packages at present which need to be replaced with one modern multi-faceted system.

The groundwork for the sub regional choice based lettings scheme has been done. The resource commitment to this project is secure. The funding from CLG will see the project through to fruition and demonstrate how sub regional CBL schemes can succeed. Even though we have applied for over £100,000 this is only 36.5% of the total project cost.