



LATEST UPDATE ON THE ROLL-OUT OF CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS

Welcome to the seventh edition of the CBL Newsletter. **This issue gives information about our current CBL research, forthcoming regional CBL seminars, and the DPM's commitment to CBL in the 5 year housing plan.**

But to start with a quick update on what has happened since the last edition of the CBL Newsletter back in 2003. Since then the evaluation report on the ODPM CBL pilots has been published, together with the study of applicants' perspectives (both are downloadable in full and summary from the ODPM website – www.odpm.gov.uk).

Following the very successful CBL pilot scheme, the roll out of choice based lettings schemes across the country is now well under way. Our interim target of 25% of authorities offering CBL by the end of 2005 looks like being exceeded, with 78 authorities already running schemes and a further 100-odd telling us that they intend to choose choice by the end of 2005¹, and, as the Deputy Prime Minister said at last year's Labour Party Conference, our aim is to work towards a nationwide system of choice in social housing covering all forms of rented accommodation – and we are committed to do this within the next five years.

We are moving choice forward in a number of other ways: we will be issuing good practice guidance in February, produced by De Montfort University's Centre for Comparative Housing Research, which will be a very useful tool for those thinking about bringing in choice. We will also be issuing for consultation further statutory guidance on CBL, particularly about how to reconcile choice and need, in the Spring.

The CIH ran two conferences in January – in Manchester and London – which set out the Government's CBL agenda and at which Housing Minister, Keith Hill, gave the key note speech (also downloadable at www.odpm.gov.uk). These were both very well attended and had excellent feedback. We are following up these conferences with a series of regional seminars.

¹ Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) 2003/4

CBL Regional Seminars

Following on from the CiH conferences we have now commissioned Lewis Live to organise a series of regional seminars on CBL. These seminars are being run on behalf of both the ODPM and the Housing Corporation and are aimed at all social landlords interested in setting up a CBL system and are an opportunity to learn from others in your region who are already operating CBL. They will be practically based events, giving participants the chance not simply to find out how schemes are set up but to make new CBL contacts, and to share ideas and good practice. They should also be a good opportunity to find out the answers to any questions you have about CBL and an opportunity to feedback your views on CBL to ODPM.

The seminars are due to commence in the South East on 8th March and so far 5 dates have been fixed:

8 March	International Hotel, Ashford, Kent
10 March	Thistle Hotel, Exeter
15 March	Marriot Metro Centre, Newcastle
17 March	Birmingham Botanical Gardens
12 April	Queens Hotel, Leeds

More are planned.

For details about these events and to book a place contact www.livegroup.co.uk/cbl or call – 020 8481 3342

Homes for All – the DPM's 5 year housing plan – Choice-Based Lettings

The DPM set out his plans for expanding the Government's CBL policy in the 5 year housing plan, "Homes for All" which was published on 24 January.

The aim is to build on the existing ODPM CBL target – for all local authorities to have adopted choice by 2010 – by extending choice-based lettings to cover not only local authority and housing association properties but also low cost home ownership options and properties for rent from private landlords.

We also want to see CBL schemes developing which span local authority boundaries and pool the available housing across a wide area – recognising that housing markets do not follow local authority boundaries. We see these wider schemes – clusters of local authorities and registered social landlords, working together with private landlords wherever possible – as the way to achieve the greatest choice and flexibility in meeting people’s housing needs.

There are a number of benefits from larger schemes: they make it possible to share ICT and advertising costs; for RSLs they cut the costs of being involved in a several different schemes; they enable greater regional mobility; and of course they bring together a larger pool of available housing, giving tenants more choice and helping to ease localised problems of high demand.

Sub-regional schemes have already been shown to work, in London (ie Locata in West London, the East London Lettings Company and Home Connections in central London) and also in Cornwall. Homefinder scheme in East Cornwall operates in a rural area with a shortage of affordable housing, and brings together three local authorities. It has broken down the barriers to joint working and offers one allocation policy across the area.

We are currently looking at how ODPM can support social landlords who are keen to work together to create sub-regional or regional schemes.

The Government also believes that, if people are to make the right choice about their housing, they must be given information and advice about all the housing options available to them, not just the properties which are available through CBL.

We know that a number of local authorities, in high demand areas especially, have progressed work on a housing options approach as part of the homelessness prevention agenda; and there are some CBL schemes which already incorporate a housing options approach, eg Croydon’s ‘Housing Options Information Service’ which promotes a wide range of services to applicants and tenants.

Overall, a housing options approach is likely to involve:

- Promoting a wider range of housing options (e.g. shared ownership, low cost owner occupation and mutual exchange schemes);
- Property and / or housing advice shops;

- Making more and better information available about other related housing services e.g. care and repair / staying put initiatives and adaptation services; and
- Marketing properties and neighbourhoods in low demand areas including targeting new groups of potential customers.

We believe that a housing options approach should be incorporated in all CBL schemes.

Research on the Longer Term Impact of Choice-Based Lettings

The evaluation of the 27 ODPM funded CBL pilots showed that overall the pilot programme was successfully implemented in both high and low demand areas. Our research with applicants also showed that they welcomed the transparency of CBL schemes and that many customers felt the extra effort of looking through available vacancies and making bids was worth it. Pilot authorities have benefited from improved customer relations and better information direct from customers themselves on where, and in what sort of properties, they want to live.

Nevertheless the evaluation did show that there were lessons to be learnt, both by the pilots themselves and those organisations that may follow. These include an early emphasis on developing methods of supporting vulnerable applicants to participate in CBL, whether through networking with existing support organisations or setting up internal advice and support services. Customers also value feedback information on the outcome of bids and their interaction with the staff who operate CBL schemes can influence their perceptions of its transparency and fairness.

We felt that it would be useful to explore some of the operational impacts of CBL that were raised by the evaluation over a longer time scale. We are particularly interested in the impact of lettings outcomes on community profiles, the role allocations can make in changing such profiles and the affect offering applicants feel that CBL vacancies has on the communities in which they live.

The first stage of this longer term research has been a survey of local housing authorities and housing associations who operate choice based lettings in order to establish a broader picture of the type of CBL schemes that are in operation. We hope to make the findings available in a later edition of this newsletter.

Hal Pawson of Heriot-Watt University will be following up the survey by contacting in February a selection of around 10 organisations, both housing authorities and housing associations, to help with our research into the longer term impacts of CBL. The research will involve interviews with lead CBL organisation staff, as well as with CBL partner organisation staff, where appropriate. These will discuss the impact organisations' feel that CBL is having on various different aspects of the organisations' work, as well as allowing staff to raise their own issues on the impact of CBL directly with the research team from Heriot-Watt University. Topics for discussion include:

- Impact on community stability due to tenancy sustainment and any knock-on effect this has on housing management policy and practice;
- Staff perspectives on the relationship between CBL and related aspects of their work such as area specific local lettings policies and homelessness.

We have also asked Heriot-Watt to explore how far CBL lettings outcomes replicate or change the outcomes achieved under the pre-CBL system to explore changing community profiles.

We have also commissioned BMRB, led by Helen Barnard, to undertake some more work with CBL applicants to explore CBL's longer term contribution towards promoting and providing more stable, viable, inclusive and integrated communities. This includes issues such as what influence CBL might have on the way applicants think about their housing and the communities in which they live: does choosing their home make applicants feel more committed to staying in a particular property and/or community, for instance?

We will again need the help of organisations operating CBL to help BMRB to identify applicants with varied experience of CBL including those who have been successful and unsuccessful in their search for a new home through CBL. All applicant's details remain completely confidential to BMRB and are only reported anonymously in an aggregated form to ODPM, as with the previous applicants study.

We have asked both Heriot-Watt and BMRB to provide us with regular progress reports so that we can keep readers informed of the progress of both studies. If you would like more information on the research please contact ODPM at the email address set out at the bottom of this Newsletter.

In the meantime the CBL pilot evaluation research studies readers are available free to download at www.odpm.gov.uk. Free copies of the summaries of the evaluation studies can also be ordered from

ODPM Free Literature
PO Box No 236
Wetherby LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1226 236
Fax: 0870 1226 237
Email: odpm@twoten.press.net

Further Information

For further information on Choice-Based Lettings or further copies of this Newsletter please see the “choosechoice” website or the Office’s website:

www.odpm.gov.uk/housing

or contact

Frances Walker	or	Andrew Lock
ODPM		ODPM
Zone 1/H4, Eland House		Zone 1/J4, Eland House
London SW1E 5DU		London SW1E 5DU
Tel: 020 7944 3666		Tel: 020 7944 6448
Fax: 020 7944 3489		Fax: 020 7944 3489

Email: choicebased_housinglettings@odpm.gov.uk