

Choice Based Lettings

County Durham Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme Newsletter

Welcome to the second edition of County Durham's Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme newsletter which will keep you up to date with the project's progress from now until the scheme's implementation in 2009.

Who should read this?

You should read this if:



You are on a housing register (waiting list) at present



You are a council or housing association tenant seeking a move to a different property with your same landlord



You may need to seek a home in the future and would like to know more about how you will do this



You work for a housing provider in County Durham and are interested in finding out more, or joining the CBL partnership



You work for any organisation that deals with people seeking housing that you could share this information with

If you have any comments or questions please contact us by:

Email: Rachel.collings@northern-consortium.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 566 1039

Write to: Rachel Collings, CBL Project Manager, Northern Housing Consortium, Webster's Ropery, Sunderland, SR4 6DJ



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Developing the Durham Key Options scheme

Welcome to the second edition of the Durham Key Options Newsletter. We hope you found the first newsletter a useful introduction to Choice Based Lettings and to the project's goal to implement a more simple, fair and easy to understand way of allocating properties across County Durham.

This edition of the newsletter considers some of the key challenges facing the project as we move towards implementation from April 2009.

Developing the new scheme


County Durham landlords are continuing to work in partnership to create a scheme that advertises all of their available properties on a weekly basis within one unified scheme – Durham Key Options.

Housing applicants will be able to choose which properties are suitable to meet their housing needs and then express an interest ('bid') on those properties. At the end of each weekly advertising cycle the applicant that best meets the qualifying criteria according to the lettings policy is offered the property. It is this qualifying criteria, set out as a banding system, that is one of the key features of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

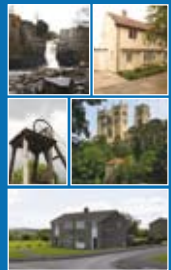
Consultation events

In developing the choice based lettings scheme all of the details on how the scheme is going to run will need to be decided. It is important that everyone living in the sub region, and all key stakeholder organisations such as Registered Social Landlords and Voluntary Sector Organisations, are given the chance to be involved in the shaping of the Choice based Lettings scheme by finding out more and sharing your views, comments and concerns.

We are holding a number of engagement events around the region to gather your views, and would welcome you get involved with any events in your area.



County Durham
Sub Regional Scheme



Choice Based Lettings
Bidding Line:
0845 2701603

www.durhamkeyoptions.co.uk

See page 2 on some of the key features of the scheme for your consideration. If you have any comments or concerns we would like you to participate in one of the forthcoming events in your area, or via the consultation process when the draft policy is complete

Durham Key Options – what do you think?

Within any choice based lettings scheme, a number of expressions of interest ('bids') may be received for one property. Applicants must therefore be prioritised in a way which is open, fair and transparent.

The preferred option is a **banding** system. This is similar to a points system but simplifies the points into broader 'bands' (groups of applicants) that reflect different levels of housing need. A banding system is the preferred method for the Durham Key Options scheme, and is currently being successfully operated as a 'pathfinder' scheme in the District of Easington.

- Should a banding system be used across County Durham?
- How many bands should there be?
- What categories of housing need should be in each band? (some are prescribed by legislation).
- What happens if two people from the same band apply for the same property? What will be the tie-breaker?
- What happens if an applicant's circumstances change?

Quota System

Using a banding system helps ensure that preference is given to those in greater housing need. However this does not mean that in operating a choice based lettings system that every property which is advertised must be allocated to the applicant with the greatest housing need. It is important to create a balance between accommodating those in the greatest need and also creating mixed communities and allowing fair access to housing for all residents. One way to achieve this is to share out an agreed **quota** of lettings to a mix of bands within the scheme. This would give the majority of properties to those in greatest housing need, but also a much smaller proportion of properties to those applicants with lower level needs in the lower bands. A quota system ensures that all applicants have a chance of being offered a property.

- Do you think we should use quotas to allocate properties?
- How should we set the quotas to ensure a fair system?

Accessing the Scheme

The nature of a choice based lettings scheme is that applicants need to be much more proactive in seeking and 'bidding' on properties. It is therefore important that the system is as accessible as possible and we want to hear your views on how we can achieve this to ensure that every applicant has the opportunity to access the scheme as easily and conveniently as possible:

- How should we present information about the scheme? Significant challenges will be posed to those with reading and writing difficulties and/or visual and audio difficulties. What about those whose first language is not English?
- The system will require residents to 'bid' for properties. In order to ensure that everyone gets the opportunity to bid we need to think about methods of bidding. Options include internet bidding, SMS text message bidding, face to face in housing offices and other locations, by post. What do you think will work best for applicants?
- Some of the most vulnerable tenants will struggle to place bids for themselves. Should residents be able to nominate someone to bid on their behalf (an advocate)? Should there be rules around who can advocate?

Advertising Properties

Information about available properties needs to be widely publicised. We have looked into a number of ways of advertising available properties and would like to hear your views:

- Potential ways of advertising include via the internet, dedicated Durham Key Options property magazine, mailing outs, and adverts in the local newspaper property guide section. What are your views on these?
- What do you think will be the most effective way of advertising properties in the sub region?
- If information about available properties is to be displayed in public places where should these be?

We want to know what you think....

There are a number of consultation events taking place around County Durham over the coming months that will be advertised in a variety of ways around your local area. Watch out for sessions taking place near you and please come along to share your views!



Partner Organisations

You can find out more about Durham Key Options by contacting your local Partner Organisation:

- City of Durham Council
- Sedgefield Borough Council
- Teesdale District Council
- Teesdale Housing Association
- Wear Valley Council
- Dale & Valley Homes
- Derwentside District Council
- Derwentside Homes
- District of Easington Council
- East Durham Homes
- Chester-Le-Street District Council