

# **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**16 February 2010**

## **ACCESS TO HOUSING POLICY REVIEW – PROGRESS REPORT**

### **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP1: Prosperous City; SP5: Attractive and Inclusive City**

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services, CIO3: Efficient and Effective Council; CIO4: Improving Partnership Working to Deliver ‘One City’.**

#### **1. Why has this report come to the Committee?**

- 1.1 The report provides members with progress on the committee’s policy review around access to housing in Sunderland.

#### **Background**

- 2.1 Following the initial scoping of the policy review at the committee’s meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2009, Members have commenced their evidence gathering in relation to Access to Housing in Sunderland. A number of focus groups have already been conducted and further focus groups and evidence gathering is still to take place.

#### **3. Current position**

- 3.1 At the last committee meeting held on 19 January 2010, members had the opportunity to discuss issues around sub-regional choice based lettings (CBL), with Mr Barry Lowther from the Tyne and Wear Housing Partnership. At this same meeting members also discussed issues around access to housing and choice based letting with the charity organisation Shelter.
- 3.2 On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2010 members met with Stephen Rudge from Coventry City Council. The meeting provided the opportunity for members to discuss issues around Choice Based Lettings with another authority who have developed and implemented a CBL scheme. The presentation from this event is attached at appendix 1 of this report for information.
- 3.3 Some of the main themes to emerge from these various presentations were as follows:

- The preferred option for a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme would be for one with a single application process, single housing register, single website and single selection process but that allows for retention of local policies except where good practice and existing similarities have been identified.
- This type of option will allow for local housing policies to continue but will bring a common register and process.
- Any scheme should be developed through work with tenants/stakeholders to ensure fairness and transparency.
- A Choice Based Lettings scheme will not produce any more properties.
- Difficult to remove the hierarchical nature of a banding system.
- Coventry City Council started with a 3 band system which has developed sub-bands in each of the 3 bands. 75% of properties are allocated via banding system priority with 25% of properties prioritised by registration date alone.
- When Coventry first moved to CBL scheme list increased from 5,000 applicants to 27,000 applicants. However 49% of those registered have never made a bid for a property.
- Neighbourhood Renewal Funding provided £400,000 which allowed Coventry City Council to invest in a computer system and staff resource to operate a CBL scheme.
- Bidding is all done electronically and 97% of all applications are also electronic. Coventry research has indicated that home is the biggest access point to their scheme.
- Terminals are available in Coventry Civic Centre, one stop shops and libraries as well as Housing Association offices and Coventry Direct Bus goes to outlying areas.
- In Coventry the recession has meant that private landlords are approaching the council to let properties. This increases properties available in desirable parts of the city and the overall number of houses available.
- Numbers of houses coming on to the CBL scheme in Coventry is very low with approximately 70 per week.

3.3 The Access to Housing working group are also to visit the Gentoo Customer Focus Group on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2010 to discuss the

issues around access to housing with a selection of tenants. This will be an opportunity for members to hear from tenants about their own experiences, views and opinions on housing and the routes into housing available across the city. A verbal update on this will be provided at the meeting by the Scrutiny Officer.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The information received from Stephen Rudge and the Gentoo Customer Focus Group will provide useful evidence as part of the committee's policy review into access to housing.

#### **5 Recommendation**

- 5.1 That Members note and comment on the information provided.

#### **6. Glossary**

CBL – Choice Based Lettings

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