

January 2011

Briefing - Progress on implementing North Yorkshire Homechoice



This is an update and briefing for all agencies providing housing related services, or supporting clients to access housing in Richmondshire about the implementation of the North Yorkshire Choice Based Lettings scheme – now known as North Yorkshire Homechoice.

Background

In late 2009 Richmondshire DC agreed to join with City of York, Scarborough BC, Hambleton DC, Broadacres and Yorkshire Coast Homes to develop sub regional Choice Based Lettings (CBL). We have subsequently been joined in this project by other North Yorkshire housing authorities and their Housing Association partners, and now all areas in North Yorkshire (except Harrogate) are implementing the scheme. Sub regional CBL schemes operate across local authority boundaries, and are designed to improve customer choice, promote opportunities for mobility and raise awareness about different housing options. They comprise joint housing applications, registers and lettings arrangements across a number of housing authority areas. In North Yorkshire we have named our scheme North Yorkshire Homechoice.

What is CBL?

CBL is a way of allocating affordable housing that is based on the public advertising of available homes. Once registered, applicants are placed in priority bands according to their level of housing need. Available homes are advertised, and applicants bid for the home of their choice. If more than one bid for a property is received a number of tie breakers are used to decide the successful applicant. Eligibility for the scheme and the criteria for bands and tie breakers are set out in a new Common Allocation Policy for North Yorkshire that has now been agreed by all partners.

More information about CBL in general, and the North Yorkshire Common Allocation Policy can be found on the Councils' website – www.richmondshire.gov.uk

What has happened so far?

The scheme has taken time to develop. Government funding has been obtained to part fund the project start up, a Project Manager has been employed by City of York and a Project Board established to oversee the work. The new Common Allocation Policy has been developed, and was subject to wide ranging public and partner consultation in the Autumn of 2009. In Richmondshire every applicant for affordable housing was sent a scheme guide, a questionnaire, and an invitation to a series of consultation events held in the market towns, together with events for Council Members, partners and stakeholders. Thank you to everyone who took part in this consultation.

The Common Allocation Policy was agreed by Richmondshire in October 2010. Following a procurement exercise a contract has now been signed with Abritas – the software supplier for the IT system that underpins the scheme - and the system build is now in full progress.

What about vulnerable people?

An Equalities Impact Assessment of CBL in North Yorkshire identified some potential for difficulties in accessing the scheme for some groups. Examples of these could be;

- Elderly or vulnerable people living in remote locations or without support
- People unable or unwilling to use the Internet
- People with no fixed abode, or with chaotic lifestyles

The scheme design has particularly aimed to address this potential for inequality. For example, the new application process seeks to specifically identify clients who may need additional support to use the scheme. There will be a range of different ways to receive information and make bids, using the post, telephone, at local offices and the internet.

We need to work with partner agencies to make sure that nobody is disadvantaged by the system, and we have

a range of plans for this.

Next Steps?

North Yorkshire Homechoice is due to go live in June 2011. The next step is to offer everyone currently registered on Richmondshire's housing register – the 'housing waiting list' for Richmondshire - the opportunity to register with North Yorkshire Homechoice.

In February 2011 every applicant currently registered will be contacted, and offered the opportunity to register with the scheme. Re registration is easy, and there are 2 ways of doing it. Applicants can either;

- Request an application form, which can be completed and returned in hard copy, or
- Register online at www.northyorkshirehomechoice.org.uk

Applicants will have an initial 28 days to register with the scheme. People who do not respond will be sent a reminder. Applicants who re register within the timescale will carry their original date of application to Richmondshire across to the new joint housing register.

Help, advice and support with re registration will be available from the Councils' housing team.

Richmondshire's staff will assess and input each new applicant to the new register, and the old and new allocations systems will run in tandem until the launch date in June.

It is important that applicants who wish to keep their housing applications live register with NY Homechoice within the specified timescale. Applications that are received later may not keep their original application date, and may lose out on allocation under the new scheme. We will publicise this widely in the local media immediately before this re registration process starts and advise applicants to get support for re registration if they need it.

Training and further advice

All housing staff involved in administering North Yorkshire Homechoice are receiving a training package about the new policy, assessing health and well being priority, operating the system and other housing options.

If you have a specific query about our plans please feel free to contact :

- Richmondshire DC – Susie Marsh, Housing Management Team Leader, 01748 827191
susie.marsh@richmondshire.gcsx.gov.uk
- For project specific queries – Ian Taylor, CBL Project Manager, 01904 554351 ian.taylor@york.gov.uk

Training and further advice

We have developed a comprehensive Communications Plan to make sure that we are communicating properly, when we need to, to the right people. We plan to use the local media, parish council networks and our Council and tenants newspapers to keep in touch. We also see these briefing papers as a useful way to communicate with fellow professionals and agencies involved in supporting applicants, and will issue more as the project develops.

If you have ideas about how we can improve our communications with you please let us know.

Thank you for taking time to read this briefing.

