

West Midlands South Housing Market Area Partnership
Bid submission for funding to develop a sub-regional CBL scheme
September 2006

A. Lead Authority: Wychavon District Council

Lead Officer: Kath Smith (Revenues & Housing Services Manager)

B. List the partners to the scheme:

South Housing Market Area Partnership, Supporting People Commissioning Body, Voluntary Sector, Zone Agents, Wychavon D C, Malvern Hills D C, Worcester CC, Wyre Forest D C, Bromsgrove D C, Redditch D C, Stratford on Avon D C, Warwick D C, Rooftop H G, Festival H G, Bromford Carinthia H G, Muir H G, Worcester Community Housing, Sanctuary H G, Housing 21, South Warwickshire H A, Focus H G, Servite Homes, Waterloo H A, Wyre Forest Community Housing, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, English Churches H G, Orbit H G, Advance H G, Friendship HA

C. Indicate which partners currently operate CBL systems and briefly describe those schemes

There are two CBL schemes already in operation within the sub-region – Warwick D C went live November 2005 and Wychavon D C in May 2006.

For both schemes the process starts with an applicant registering for the scheme. Properties are advertised showing a photo, details of the property and any eligibility criteria. Currently properties include socially rented and shared ownership. Both schemes use a range of advertising routes such as internet / Council offices / Town and Parish Council offices / one stop shops & libraries/ telephone. Warwick also advertises in the local newspaper and Wychavon in RSL offices and local supermarkets.

Properties are advertised on a bidding cycle which for Warwick is fortnightly and Wychavon is weekly. Home seekers can bid for properties via the internet / integrated telephony and in Wychavon by text messaging. Vulnerable people are assisted to bid by local support agencies or housing officers. There is a cap on the number of properties an applicant can bid for within any cycle – Warwick limit to 5 bids and Wychavon to 2 bids but with the ability check their position and to change bids at anytime.

Both schemes operate on bandings – the Warwick scheme is based upon two bands according to need; within each band, points are applied. Band 1 (highest needs) applicants are considered in date order and in Band 2 (lower needs) considered in points priority – the Wychavon scheme operates on three bands according to need and within bands priority is given based on the time registered.

The band and date of successful applicants are published to help applicants make informed choices about their housing options

D. List other landlords which are not partners but have indicated willingness to participate in the proposed scheme to some extent; and indicate the extent to which they will be involved in the scheme

E. Indicate the proportion of each partner landlord's stock (existing and new) which will be included in the scheme (0-25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, 75-100%)

Within the sub-region 6 of the 8 Local Authorities (L.A.s) have transferred their stock to Registered Social Landlords (R.S.L.s). Many of the RSLs have stock across a number of the 8 L.A.s as well as other sub-regional areas. It is anticipated that the sub-regional scheme will involve approximately 75 – 100% of the RSL and LA stock. Properties advertised will be socially rented, shared ownership properties and other low cost home ownership. It is anticipated that local private landlords will work with us to advertise their vacancies. This may start on a fairly small scale but will increase with time.

F. Describe the scheme for which you are seeking support

(1) Summarise the key objectives of the scheme

- To provide a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme across the 8 L.A.s, providing consistency in the home seeking process cross authority
- To enable home seekers to be empowered to make their own choices about where they want to live
- To ensure the scheme is accessible by all those in housing need, particularly the more vulnerable
- To make the process simpler, more transparent, fair and easy to use with only one registration for access to the whole sub-region
- To support mobility within the sub-region particularly where local connections are evidenced, **in line with the regional Housing Strategy**
- To enable applicants to make realistic choices about their housing options with social rented, intermediate and private housing all available via the CBL scheme
- To prevent and reduce the placement of homeless households in temporary accommodation by giving people realistic choices
- Improve the mix and sustainability of local communities
- By working together across all sectors to make efficiencies in the home seeker process

(2) Outline how the scheme would offer greater choice to applicants, in particular the extent to which applicants will play an active part in vacancy selection; and how the scheme would provide greater choice to homeless applicants

The sub-regional CBL scheme will provide a consistent approach to assisting home seekers across the 8 L.A.'s with a range of tenure options. There will be a common housing register which will offer people more choice about where they want to live, and a common banding system for all L.A. areas with flexibility built in for the individual housing providers primarily via the advertising of properties e.g. management moves, specific eligibility criteria. This will be particularly beneficial in matching adapted properties to households with a disabled member in housing need.

Adverts will include a photograph of the property, rental/mortgage costs and the eligibility criteria specific to the property. Eventually it is hoped that links can be established to GIS to enable people to view the general area and the nearest facilities e.g. schools, leisure centres etc helping them to make the best choice to suit their needs. Short listed applicants will be offered a viewing prior to

accepting the property to give the opportunity for questions and to ensure the home is right to meet their needs.

It will be important to engage with hard to reach groups and those from minority groups. These groups have previously found it hard to access services due to language barriers, cultural barriers and the nature of their lifestyle. The partnership will be consulting with local stakeholders e.g. black & minority ethnic, gypsies, no fixed abodes, disabled people, people with learning disabilities etc and making contact with relevant organisations such as Ethnic Access, Social Services, and Primary Care Trusts to ensure our communication networks are appropriate to meet local people's needs.

The CBL scheme will be a key tool in preventing homelessness by offering people realistic housing options in an open and transparent way, helping people to make choices. Access is identical whether threatened with homelessness, homeless and in temporary accommodation etc. Priority will be given to statutory homeless applicants for use within the L.A. where they have been accepted but at the same time they will be able to bid for other properties within the sub-region via the normal banding system.

(3) Indicate whether it is proposed to pilot the scheme first (for example, with one landlord, or across a specified type of stock owned by all landlords); or whether it is proposed to implement across the area in one go

It is intended to roll out the CBL scheme quite quickly within the sub-region, certainly within 18 months.

The recent implementation of CBL within the Wychavon district went remarkably well and was achieved within a 6 month period. This approach and lessons learned are to be applied to enable smooth roll out in partner L.A. areas. A Project Coordinator is to be employed to help facilitate the implementation across the sub-region.

(4) Indicate any plans to include shared ownership and low cost home ownership options within the scheme

All 8 District Councils and local RSL providers will include shared ownership stock and low cost home ownership stock within the CBL scheme. Discussions have been held with the local Homebuy Zone Agents who are partners to this bid and they are very supportive of a sub-regional CBL scheme which will complement their role in promoting affordable intermediate housing options.

(5) Indicate any plans to bring on board the private rented sector

We are keen to use the CBL scheme to offer people a wide range of housing options including privately rented accommodation. We plan to build on the work we have undertaken within the sub-region on improving condition and access to the private rented sector. We will link with the local Landlord Forums. Previous consultation and feedback indicates that smaller private landlords are very interested as significant efficiencies could be achieved.

As part of the involvement of private landlords, we hope to be able to offer them the additional benefits of access to local rent deposit / bond schemes, property standard advice and grants, fast track housing benefit for homeless cases etc

(6) Indicate if any partners already operate a housing options approach and/or if any partners plan to adopt such an approach as part of or alongside the CBL scheme. Give brief details

The sub-regional CBL scheme will build on the existing housing option approaches of partner agencies. Options for applicants will be considered on a case by case basis at the point of registration and at any future point of contact as necessary. Where appropriate, this will include housing advice services, rent deposit/bond schemes, 3rd party rent payments, use of homeless prevention funds, discretionary housing grants, sanctuary scheme measures, downsizing incentives, Care & Repair services, adaptations, minor repairs, lifeline service, floating support services and many more

(7) Indicate whether any of the partner LAs operate a common housing register. Indicate whether there are plans to adopt a common housing register across all partners to the scheme

The majority of partners operate with common housing registers. A culture of working closely together across LAs and RSLs and indeed other partners within LA boundaries exists. There is also strong sub-regional partnering. The proposed CBL scheme offers sufficient flexibility to enable a common banding approach within the sub-region. The issues of homelessness, management moves, local lettings policies, local connection criteria etc can all be accommodated via the advertising of properties enabling a common banding system to be implemented from the start. This will enable housing providers and L.A.s to retain some autonomy and local identity.

(8) Indicate if partners plan to adopt a common allocation scheme or common prioritisation criteria?

We plan to adopt a common banding scheme which will enable us to make comparisons of the needs of applicants cross authority and to effectively monitor outcomes within the sub-region including mobility. This information will be important to feed into the rolling sub-regional housing market assessment which is currently nearing completion and will be updated annually.

(9) Describe arrangements for mobility between local authority districts within the scheme

Throughout the West Midlands Housing Strategy 2005-2021 there is a strong theme of developing pathways of choice for all who live in or are moving into the West Midlands region. The South Housing Market Area is one of four sub-regional areas, and the main issues are very high housing need with the BIG issue being the increasing affordability gap, low levels of social rented accommodation and high homelessness index score

In-migration into the area from the conurbation of Birmingham but also from the south east is significant and exacerbates the housing need of local people. The Regional Housing Strategy is clear that local needs should be the priority.

The proposed banding scheme therefore allows for higher priority to be given for people with a local connection to the area where they are seeking housing. This means that within the common banding there is scope for people to have higher priority in some areas over others based on their local connections e.g. an applicant may want to consider Wychavon and Malvern Hills but only have a local connection with Wychavon – they will have higher priority with Wychavon compared to Malvern even though the basic bandings are the same. They will however be able to actively bid for available properties, cross tenure, in both areas. Experience in Wychavon shows that this works well with no need to identify a quota for mobility moves cross authority. This will however be an area that is subject to regular review.

(10) Describe plans for monitoring and how this will feed into the development of the scheme

We will measure the success of the scheme by evaluating;

- Ease of access across all client groups – level and profile of bids

- Feedback from partner organisations who have a role in assisting the more vulnerable households
- Customer satisfaction generally
- Number and range of partners involved and properties advertised
- Need for repeat adverts
- General monitoring reports i.e. ethnicity, age, household make-up, mobility, homelessness, adapted homes etc

We will feedback to every applicant via an annual newsletter incorporating all of the key performance measures and outcomes.

G. Approval for the scheme and consultation

This bid has full support from elected members in all of the partner L.A. s and full commitment of all other partners to the bid. All L.A.s have a target in their Housing Strategies of achieving Choice Based Lettings to meet the national Government target.

In developing this bid on behalf of the South Housing Market Area Partnership, we have held 2 consultation events inviting partners and other key stakeholders including statutory and voluntary organisations. We have also spoken to Landlord Forums, the Homebuy Zone Agent, Ethnic Access, Homeless Officer Group, Private Sector Officer Group, Supporting People, Chief Housing Officer Group and tenants groups. Wider consultation and training will be carried out as part of the CBL implementation process.

As part of our communication strategy we will ensure high quality information is available about the sub-regional CBL scheme in a range of formats e.g. leaflets, website, video, presentations, posters etc. On implementation we will ensure a hotline phone number and various media releases in the local press and radio.

H. Sharing good practice

The Partnership would be more than willing to provide feedback to the GOWM and the DCLG on the implementation, the process, customer feedback, good practice etc which may help implementation of other similar schemes elsewhere across the county.

Wychavon D C is a Regional Homelessness Champion and will have many opportunities to spread word of our experiences to other Las and RSLs.

I. Provide an outline timetable for the project

Key Stage	Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raise awareness of the success of our bid with Members, Stakeholders, Tenants and the Public ▪ Commence cleansing of the existing registers 	January 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agree in detail the sub-regional CBL model, policy, procedure and protocols based on the existing model in operation in the Wychavon district since May 2006 	January – March 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partners agreement to CBL model and procurement arrangements 	April 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Procurement and implementation of IT 	April – June 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arrangements for Data transfer ▪ Make applicants aware of Plans 	July – August 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff/Partner training ▪ Other organisation/member briefing 	September – October 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data migration & Testing ▪ Publicity campaign 	October – November 2007

▪ 'Go Live' with Sub-regional VCBL scheme	November / December 2007
▪ Monitoring and Review	January – February 2008
▪ Implement minor changes	March 2008
▪ Customer consultation and evaluation	September – October 2008
▪ Changes if required	November – October 2008
▪ Future development / enhancements	6 monthly meetings of partners to discuss

Meetings of CBL Sub-regional Project steering Group will continue every 2 months throughout implementation.

J. Provide detailed costing and the extent of funding you are applying for from the department

Project costs for CBL

IT

Software / changes to housing databases, interactive website

Telephone system requirements

Digital cameras and software

On-line form – multiple languages

SMS mobile phone bidding

Publicity / Printing / Advertising

Publicity/consultation

Printing costs – new allocations policy, leaflets etc

Extra staffing costs

Sub-regional Project Manager – Full time post for 18 months

IT training days

Total

Cost (£'s)

£25,000 each LA x 7 =

£175,000

£1,000 each LA x 7 =

£7,000

£300 each LA x 7 =

£2,100

£3,250 each LA x 8 =

£26,000

£1,000 each LA x 7 =

£7,000

£500 per LA x 8 = **£4,000**

£500 per LA x 8 = **£4,000**

£100,635

£650 per day x 2 days

per LA = **£9,100**

£334,635

Breakdown of funding to meet these costs:

DCLG funding

- capital split
- revenue split

Local Authorities

- Wychavon D C and partner RSLs
- Malvern Hills D C and partner RSLs
- Worcester C C and partner RSLs
- Wyre Forest D C and partner RSLs
- Bromsgrove D C and partner RSLs
- Redditch B C and partner RSLs
- Stratford on Avon D C and partner RSLs
- Warwick D C and partner RSLs

Total

It is acknowledged that our bid exceeds the £100,000 limit however this is because it is considered that exceptional circumstances apply. All 8 LAs within the South Housing Market Area are willing to participate within the scheme and are supporting this bid. Of these 8 LAs, 6 need to implement CBL to meet the Government target by 2010. The LAs are aiming to achieve roll out within an 18 month period implementing a common register and banding system.