

## **Allocations Strategy**

### **1.00 Background**

- 1.1 Since publication of the Government Housing Green Paper “Quality and Choice” in 2000, Local authorities and Housing Associations have been encouraged to introduce greater choice to housing home seekers (applicants) in the allocation of social rented housing.
- 1.2 Local Authorities (LAs) are expected to have introduced Choice Based Lettings (CBL) schemes by 2010 and Housing Associations are expected to co-operate with these schemes.
- 1.3 This Allocation Strategy develops the current approach taken to facilitate the county wide development of CBL schemes in Devon and in Cornwall.
- 1.4 A pre-requisite to the development of more consistent and effective choice based allocations systems is that LAs develop Housing Registers, that permit all applications for social rented housing to be made through a central register whether they are current tenants wishing to transfer or applicants seeking to access social housing.
- 1.5 These new working arrangements make the older more established process of giving the LA 100% nomination rights to allocate New Developments and 75% nomination rights to subsequent Re-Lets, redundant. To develop effective CBLs and deliver effective local or special lettings policies within these schemes requires a central point of entry with specific regard to local circumstances.

### **2.0 Strategy Objectives**

Westcountry’s objectives in the allocation of social rented housing are:

- 2.1 Facilitate choice of accommodation for people in the greatest housing need who have limited housing options.
- 2.2 Assist LAs in the delivery of their Housing and Homeless Strategies
- 2.3 Support applicants in housing need who are particularly disadvantaged in the allocation of rented housing and to provide a source of housing to other organisations assisting those in housing need.
- 2.4 Ensure that access into housing is fair and equitable and promotes equality.
- 2.5 Continue to build sustainable communities.
- 2.6 Develop local lettings or special lettings plans that are scheme specific and promote scheme and local sustainability.

- 2.7 *Make accessible as wide a range of property and housing options as possible to meet individual need including disability.*
- 2.8 *Ensure that the property is affordable and value for money solutions are always sought.*
- 3.0 **Choice Based Lettings**
- 3.1 *Westcountry has always sought to support and to co-operate with the introduction of CBL schemes by LAs and has actively been involved in the Devon Project Group.*
- 3.2 *All existing CBL schemes and nomination arrangements in Devon and Cornwall will be amalgamated into two county wide CBL schemes, one in Devon and one in Cornwall.*
- 3.3 *The Devon Home Choice Scheme will go live in December 2009.*
- 3.4 *The Cornwall Homechoice Scheme will go live in March 2010.*
- 3.5 *Westcountry's role in supporting these schemes is to ensure that all applicants seeking housing are referred to the LA Housing Register in the area of their choice, allowing home seekers a single point of entry.*
- 3.6 *The schemes allow all applicants for social housing, whether they are new or current tenants seeking a transfer, a single point of entry to access all social rented housing stock.*
- 3.7 *In addition, migration across borders is agreed by each LA on a percentage basis, written into the Devon Home Choice and Cornwall Homechoice Policies. This enables those home seekers who wish to transfer to alternative accommodation outside a specific LA area for work or family reasons, to have greater flexibility.*
- 4.0 **Transfers**
- 4.1 With the increasing prevalence of Choice Based Lettings, and in the drive to further promote choice across a range of areas, the traditional nominations agreements are becoming redundant. Choice Based Lettings schemes allow home seekers to make more informed choices with a greater degree of transparency about what stock is available and where they would like to live.
- 4.2 Westcountry no longer operates a transfer waiting list but gives 90% of vacant properties to the relevant LA Housing Register
- 4.3 The retained potential of 10% of re lettings is reserved for:
- 4.4 Urgent mobility moves across local authority boundaries, for example, because of harassment or domestic violence. These moves will be supported by local external agencies such as the police or social services.

4.5 *Mobility moves in sheltered accommodation, to ensure that existing WH tenants are not disadvantaged when they need to move from upper to ground floor for health reasons.*

4.6 Where ever possible Westcountry would seek to work with LA s to manage these moves within the Housing Registers thus ensuring the continuance of transparency of allocation of social rented housing.

4.7 Where possible Westcountry will develop lettings plans with LA's to ensure that each year a balance is achieved in all lettings between homeless households/applicants from the Housing Register /current rented applicants seeking a transfer and lettings achieved via sensitive lettings or local lettings plans.

## 5.0 **Mutual Exchanges**

5.1 *Under CBL tenants will have limited opportunities to move as the majority will not be awarded a high band status. This not only limits tenant choice, but also their social mobility.*

5.2 *In order to increase the options available to WH tenants Homeswapper the Mutual Exchange service will be utilized .This service is free to tenants.*

## 6.0 **Financial Resources of Applicants**

6.1 *Both the Devon and Cornwall CBL policies allow for applications from people with financial resources, leaving it for individual social housing providers to set their own limits.*

6.2 *As applicants with financial resources could have an impact on Westcountry's charitable status, each applicant will be assessed on their personal circumstances set against their ability to obtain property in the area of their choice.*

## 7.0 **Ethnic Monitoring Policy**

7.1 In order to ensure that within the range of allocations undertaken that equality of opportunity is always consistently provided, analysis of successful allocations and refusals of accommodation are kept by LA area. Westcountry has a target of 3% of allocations to BME groups during the year. This is monitored quarterly.

7.2 In addition Westcountry will summarise for each LA the outcomes of lettings within a financial year thus aiding the LA understanding of what supports a sustainable community. A profile of allocations in a given year will assess the BME analysis of new tenancies and will advise on how these tenancies are progressing including an analysis on arrears /ASB /requests for a move to alternative accommodation. The analysis will be by scheme and not linked to individual households.

8.0 **Local (or special) Lettings Plans**

8.1 These plans are not only used for new schemes, but for existing areas in partnership with the LA to compliment a neighbourhood centred initiative.

8.2 Stock may be structurally sound and meet current Decent Homes requirements, but compromised due to lack of communal facilities or social circumstances such as crime, drugs or antisocial behaviour. Plans as described above for sensitive relettings would be developed with residents, the LA and other key stakeholders.

8.3 Where we have developed and operated lettings plans, there is a review of the plans 12 months from their inception to assess effectiveness. By using this method we can refine plans for subsequent lettings and develop our knowledge base of operational good practice for the future.

9.0 **Annual Lettings Feedback**

9.1 Each year feedback on allocations completed within an LA area is provided for our LA partners including analysis of refusals, outcomes from BME analysis and comparators and tenancy sustainability as noted above

9.2 Annual meetings are held with LA's where we have completed significant development projects and /or with our preferred partner L As. This is particularly significant where we are seeking to develop localised services. A current example would be the development of WH's response to the Respect Agenda which we see as both corporately consistent yet with a local emphasis to suit circumstances

10.0 **Assessment of Sustainability**

10.1 An assessment is made of an applicant's potential for sustaining their tenancy and, if there are any support needs, an appropriate care or support plan must be in place. LAs are asked to provide details of any support requirements with nominations to facilitate this assessment.

11.0 **Eligibility**

11.1 After consultation with LA partners, and in accordance with the Housing Corporation Regulatory Circular 07/04, WH is not advocating any automatic barriers to access into its affordable rented stock.

- 11.2 In the following cases we would carry out additional research into the circumstances of households/individuals in conjunction with the LA where:-
- 11.3 They have been evicted for a serious breach of terms of tenancy such as ASB or racial harassment (within 2 years of the eviction date). Consideration will be given where a tenancy has been conducted satisfactorily after this date.
- 11.4 They have been evicted by WH for rent arrears or where it is known that rent arrears are outstanding to another RSL. Assessments will be made as to whether the applicant has made reasonable efforts to remedy this and appropriate arrangements for repayment of debts are in place and can be demonstrated.
- 11.5 *They have been evicted from any accommodation for rent arrears or where it is known that there are rent arrears with no extenuating circumstances and where it cannot be demonstrated that reasonable efforts have been made to clear the arrears.*
- 11.6 Existing care packages cannot be guaranteed at the new address or where there is an acute vulnerability and no history of on going and sustained engagement with support services.
- 11.7 *We have information which leads us to believe they will cause ASB either through their own or associates behaviour and we are unable to get housing related support at the time of any offer to alleviate this possibility.*
- 11.8 Older persons accommodation will not be offered where the head of Customer & Community Services is of the opinion that the needs of the applicant cannot be met by the services available at the scheme.
- 11.9 Where a potential nominee has misrepresented personal or household circumstances or staff become aware at pre-tenancy stages that information pertinent to their housing application has been withheld or is false.
- 11.10 WH in accordance with national Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) will provide reasonable assistance to LAs by providing appropriate housing for ex –offenders this includes sex offenders .This is subject to close consultation with LA, police, probation and other necessary agencies to confirm that the applicant would not present a high risk in a particular location, and that the necessary care and support plans are in place to safeguard the tenancy and the neighbourhood.
- 12.0 **Appeals Procedure**
- 12.1 Nominees may ask for a review of the WH decision to refuse their nomination.
- 12.2 They should do this (preferably in writing) within 21 days of notification of the decision and must include any additional information they have in support of their appeal.

- 12.3 This will be considered by the Head of Community & Customer Services, who will investigate the reasonableness of the refusal and will advise the applicant in writing of the decision within 14 days, unless a mutually agreed alternative timescale is agreed.
- 12.4 In some cases the LA might wish to join with the applicant or approach WH directly.
- 12.5 Following this decision if the applicant is still dissatisfied then they are able to register their dissatisfaction through the Complaints Procedure and it will be investigated independently.