

CABINET

9 July 2010

ANNUAL REVIEW OF HAMPSHIRE HOME CHOICE

REPORT OF HEAD OF STRATEGIC HOUSING

Contact Officer: Andrew Palmer Tel No: 01962 848152

RECENT REFERENCES:

[CAB 1774](#) Local Lettings Plans & Charging Agreement for CBL – 14 January 2009

[SO98](#) Draft Statutory Guidance on Social Housing Allocations – 10th November 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Hampshire Home Choice, the Council's Choice Based Lettings scheme in partnership with East Hampshire District Council and Havant Borough Council, was launched on the 22 April 2009. Attached as Appendix 1 is the Annual Report of the partnership setting out key performance information and recommendations for improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the Annual Report is noted.
- 2 That the Portfolio Holder for Communities, be authorised to make any changes to the Hampshire Home Choice Allocations Framework under the portfolio holder decision making scheme.
- 3 That subject to Test Valley Borough Council making a formal application to join Hampshire Home Choice they are accepted as part of the sub-regional partnership.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council launched Hampshire Home Choice on the 22 April 2009 in partnership with East Hampshire District Council and Havant Borough Council. The introduction of this choice based system was a fundamental change to the allocation of affordable housing vacancies and was the culmination of a 3 year project.
- 1.2 The two main changes for customers were, the removal of the old points based system to a simplified Banding method of assessment and the ability to bid for all affordable housing vacancies across the participating LA's. Such a radical change did come with risks (and potential rewards) for Winchester applicants and therefore the Council's Cabinet requested a report back on the first year of operation.
- 1.3 The Annual Review Report was prepared by a small project team of Officers drawn from the three Authorities. The brief was, to provide a summary of key performance information as well as review of the scheme in light of the Government's statutory guidance on allocations (Fair & Flexible) - published in January 2010.

2 Detail

- 2.1 The Annual report is available as Appendix 1 of this report. The intention is that this report is presented to all 3 participating LA's and will be available on – line for customers to view. Regular feedback on individual property lettings is also available on – line on the Hampshire Home Choice website. The information published details the successful applicants Band and registration date (but not their name) which helps inform other applicants about potential waiting times for properties.
- 2.2 Key findings of the review include,
 - Customer satisfaction – 90% of respondents to a customer satisfaction survey carried out in March 2010 agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme is easy to access and understand. Negative comments mainly related to accessibility to those customers who did not have the internet.

- Cross boundary moves – across the partnership about 15% of allocations went to households who lived outside of the LA area, the proportion of Winchester’s properties let to households from the other 2 areas was slightly above average at 17%. The table in paragraph 2.5 of the Annual Report gives more detail on this point where it appears that locally hard to let properties especially sheltered housing are being filled by applicants from outside Winchester . With regard to three bed housing we have seen 6 of our homes go to applicants from outside the Winchester District. However 6 of our own applicants have been housed outside the District.
 - Refusals – one of the benefits of the scheme was expected to be the reduction in refusal rates of properties. This has in part occurred. However, in some areas they remain disproportionately high. Further work is planned to investigate this issue as it does directly impact on the void times of properties.
 - Fair and Flexible Statutory Guidance – the summary of the review team can be found in paragraph 4.4 of the Annual Review. Two issues have been raised that will require further investigation and consultation with Members and applicants . Firstly, whether to remove the cumulative reasonable preference priorities awarded in Band 2 of the scheme (in line with case law, R v Newham LBC) and secondly whether to give additional priority to applicants moving to take up job opportunities. It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Communities be authorised to take any decision on changes to the Scheme of Allocation recommended by the review, under the portfolio holder decision making scheme.
- 2.3 Future Issues – Hampshire Home Choice (HHC) has proved to be a popular and successful Choice Based Lettings scheme. Its success has attracted the attention of the Communities and Local Government Department and neighbouring authorities who have started to enquire about the possibilities of joining the scheme. An approach has been made by Test Valley Borough Council to join the scheme to the HHC Board (the Officer governance mechanism outlined in para.1.2 of the Annual review) who have in principal accepted the proposal (subject to Member approval).
- 2.4 The Board have taken into account the risks of Test Valley BC joining the scheme which have principally been concerned with the housing need and development opportunities within the Test Valley area as none of the LA’s would want to see a disproportionate number of cross border moves. Test Valley BC have also had to consider these same factors in relation to demand for their own stock. The acceptance of further partners does bring benefits both to applicants through greater choice of properties and to the partner LA’s through efficiency gains. The Council is saving £40,000pa from its General Fund costs and has significantly reduced the number of vacant hard to let sheltered properties through the current partnership arrangements. Member approval is therefore sought for accepting Test Valley BC into the HHC partnership. Any further applications from Hampshire Authorities will be evaluated by the HHC Board before a Member decision is sought on whether to approve (or not) the request. Further savings will be made if additional

LA's join HHC however there will be a loss of local influence and increased competition for affordable housing vacancies.

3 TACT COMMENT ON THE REPORT

3.1 On reading through this report the TACT Chairs have found a fair degree that seems to be working quite well, plus one or two concerns that are listed below.

3.2 Over all now that Hampshire Home Choice is up and running, and has had time to sort out initial teething troubles, TACT hope it will continue to provide the service it was set up to do.

1. Negative comments mainly related to accessibility to those customers who do not have the internet. How do you propose to overcome this?

2. Monitoring of the risks that the Board have taken into account regarding the Test Valley BC joining the scheme, would seem essential.

3. Cross boundary moves, may in future give some rise for concern?

3.3 TACT have no problems, with the recommendations, made in the paper, and will be following the progress of the Hampshire Home Choice closely, and wish it well for the future.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN (RELEVANCE TO):

4.1 Safe and strong communities – promoting an inclusive society by enabling the provision of and access to affordable housing

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 None, however opportunities for further collaborative working will occur as and when new partners join Hampshire Home Choice.

6 RISK IMPLICATIONS:

As set out in paragraph 2.4 above the principal risk of accepting another partner into HHC is the effect it may have on Winchester residents not being able to obtain local housing. This may occur if the new partner has very high levels of need but very few affordable homes for its own residents. Investigations have shown that Test Valley BC has similar number of applicants on its waiting list (3000) and a stock of affordable housing very similar to the Winchester District (6800). If inequalities in cross boundary moves begin to occur then the HHC partners have agreed that the Scheme of Allocation can be amended (subject to each LA's Member approval).

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Fair and Flexible – statutory guidance on social housing allocations

APPENDICES:

Hampshire Home Choice Annual Review



Hampshire Home Choice



Hampshire Home Choice Annual Review 2009 - 2010



Hampshire Home Choice Annual Review 2009 / 2010



1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to review the first year of operation of the Hampshire Home Choice scheme (HHC). Hampshire Home Choice was launched in April 2009 and is a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme managed by East Hampshire District Council, Havant Borough Council and Winchester City Council. The Review has examined

- Hampshire Home Choice scheme performance during 2009/10
- the outcomes of a customer consultation and feedback exercise completed in March 2010
- whether the Hampshire Home Choice Allocations Framework is compliant with 'Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England' issued by the CLG December 2009.

1.1 Background

The Hampshire Home Choice scheme provides an alternative to the traditional systems for the allocation of social rented housing. In traditional allocations schemes vacant social housing is allocated to applicants by local authorities. HHC has adopted the principals of offering customers choice in where they wish to live by advertising vacant social housing and inviting customers to "bid" for properties. Where more than one customer applies for a property the Hampshire Home Choice Allocations

Framework assesses which customer has priority.

The Hampshire Home Choice scheme is considered an important part the strategic approach to meeting housing need in the East Hampshire, Havant and Winchester council areas. Within this sub-region it is recognised that market housing is unaffordable for most customers in housing need, and that meeting the needs of households threatened with homelessness or who simply need affordable housing, is becoming increasingly difficult. Hampshire Home Choice is helping develop a more effective market for social housing across the three Council areas in which customers can make decisions about social housing based on clear information of all of the available options.

Principals of the Hampshire Home Choice scheme:

- to give customers as much choice as possible.*
- 100% of social lettings which the Councils have nomination rights to, be made through the scheme. Each Council may agree some specific exceptions.*
- to enable customers to make bids for properties across the 3 Council areas.*
- to increase understanding and satisfaction with the lettings scheme.*
- to give new and existing tenants a stake in sustainable communities.*
- to meet housing need.*
- to make the best use of social housing.*
- to improve the time it takes to let properties for landlords.*
- to reduce the number of properties refused by customers.*
- to allocate scarce social housing resources in a fair way.*
- to let social housing in an equitable, open, accountable and transparent manner.*
- to meet the legal requirements for the allocation of social housing.*



1.2 Governance

The scheme is regulated by the Hampshire Home Choice Board. The board is made up of representatives from the three Councils plus participation from Winchester Landlord Services and two housing association members. The board meets bi-monthly. Below the board there are two sub committees, an Officer Group managing operational matters and the User Group made up of all participating landlords. This gives an opportunity for all partners to be kept up to date and consulted with. Landlords also have the

opportunity to give the Councils feedback on how they feel the scheme is working.

1.3 Equalities

The Hampshire Home Choice scheme was subject to an Equality Impact Assessment in June 2009. The HHC Equality Action Plan is being implemented by a working group, which is monitoring the effectiveness of the scheme in relation to vulnerable customers.

Further details are available on the HHC website.



Woolston Road Havant - Guinness Hermitage



Littleton Winchester - Hyde



2.0 Hampshire Home Choice Scheme Performance 2009/10

2.1 Hampshire Home Choice Activity

2009/10 Hampshire Home Choice
 Website hits = 5.1m
 Average website hits per day = 14,000
 Total number of visitors to the site = 323,559

The visitor numbers are very encouraging and show that there are approximately 6200 visitors to the site every week. It would appear that the scheme has attracted a high level of interest.

2.2 Housing Register

A total of 9387 customers were registered with Hampshire Home Choice as at 31/03/2010. The highest numbers are registered with East Hampshire at 3761, with 3021 in Havant and 2605 in Winchester. Most significantly the number of customers registered has

increased by over 1,000 during the year. This has been partly due to the re-registration of customers from the previous housing registers as well as customers attracted by the launch of the new scheme. New applications during the first three months of 2010 have continued to be high at over 200 per month.

Hampshire Home Choice Customers registered at 31/03/2010 by Council, Band and bedroom size								
	Band	studio	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed	Total
East Hampshire District Council	1	6	3	2	1	1	0	13
	2	88	60	90	30	14	0	282
	3	944	312	621	176	21	1	2075
	4	328	163	263	67	6	0	827
	5	209	81	192	66	16	0	564
	Total		1575	619	1168	340	58	1
Havant Borough Council	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	2	14	3	4	5	2	0	28
	3	1005	244	710	182	4	0	2145
	4	227	61	87	21	1	0	397
	5	210	66	131	42	0	0	449
	Total		1457	374	933	250	7	0
Winchester City Council	1	2	0	3	1	0	0	6
	2	64	23	36	49	1	0	173
	3	722	180	436	51	3	0	1392
	4	366	122	213	28	0	0	729
	5	159	52	79	15	0	0	305
	Total		1313	377	767	144	4	0
HHC Total		4345	1370	2868	734	69	1	9387

2.3 Breakdown by Ethnic Origin of all customers

Good practice usually recognises that the housing register should mirror the ethnic balance of the local population as a whole. The table below confirms that the number of ethnic minority customers registered in East Hampshire and Havant

is as would be expected at around 3% of all customers. However, the data for Winchester shows 15% of customer applications were from ethnic minorities. This figure seems particularly high and requires further analysis by the HHC Officer Group to understand why there is this anomaly.

Hampshire Home Choice customers by ethnic origin				
Local Authority Area	White groups	All other ethnic groups		% other than white groups
East Hants District Council	3107	111	3218	3.449
Havant Borough Council	3327	114	3441	3.312
Winchester City Council	2309	419	2728	15.35
Total	8743	644	9387	7.37 %

2.4 Lettings by Council area and property type

More than 1,000 lettings were made during the year with the highest number of lettings made in the Winchester area. Both East Hampshire (240) and Havant

(277) also achieved a higher number of lettings than anticipated. Nearly half of the lettings were for studio flats and one bed flats. Only 10% of lettings were three bed homes, and only 13 four bed homes were let.

Hampshire Home Choice Lettings by Council area and property type						
Lettings	Studios	1 Bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	Total
Havant	33	98	120	25	1	277
East Hants	23	101	83	31	2	240
Winchester	6	235	183	54	10	488
Total	62	434	386	110	13	1005

2.5 Cross boundary lettings

The scheme requirements to help customers have increased access to social housing have been partly met. Analysis of the figures show that during the first year of Hampshire Home Choice 147 (15%) customers moved across council boundaries. 10% of lettings in East Hampshire were made to customers

from Havant and Winchester. 12% of lettings in Havant went to customers from East Hampshire and Winchester. The highest level of moves was recorded in Winchester where 17% of lettings were made to customers from East Hampshire and Havant.

Cross boundary Lettings 2009/10						
	Studios	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	Total
All lettings	62	434	386	110	13	1005
East Hampshire properties to East Hants customers	21	90	74	28	1	214
to Winchester customers	0	1	4	1	1	7
to Havant customers	2	10	5	2	0	19
Havant properties to Havant customers	29	88	106	19	1	243
to East Hampshire customers	4	9	9	1	0	23
to Winchester customers	0	1	5	5	0	11
Winchester properties to Winchester customers	6	198	142	48	7	401
to East Hampshire customers	0	17	22	2	1	42
to Havant customers	0	20	19	4	2	45

2.6 Refusal rate

Whilst the scheme has promoted choice for customers it has also allowed customers to refuse offers once they are made. The data in the table below shows the number of offers which have been refused, this seems to be high (676) and this was not anticipated when the scheme was set up. A more detailed look at this area is required to fully understand the overall picture.

59% of the refusals were Winchester offers, whereas the East Hampshire rate was only 9%. The area of concern is concentrated on one bed and studio homes and it is assumed that the high refusal rate is concentrated around sheltered housing. A recommendation is made that the Officer Group carry out a more detailed review of this issue.

Refusal rate by local authority area						
	1bed	Studios	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	Total
All lettings	349	245	76	6	676	
East Hampshire	37	11	11	1	60	
Havant	105	88	21	2	216	
Winchester	207	146	44	3	400	



Woolston Road, Havant Guinness Hermitage



Queens Road , Petersfield - Drum



3.0 Customer Consultation and Feedback

3.1 The Hampshire Home Choice Board agrees that a key part of the Review was to gain an understanding of how customers perceive the scheme and to monitor the number of complaints. A customer satisfaction survey was conducted between 1st March and 9th April 2010. The survey was available for completion on the Hampshire Home Choice website and 600 paper surveys were sent to customers who had accepted social housing through the scheme.

3.2 In total the survey had 180 responses, including 24%, (43) which

were completed online. Customers were asked a series of questions which were designed to measure their satisfaction with the scheme, ranging from whether they thought Hampshire Home Choice was a fair way of allocating social housing, to reasons why the customer had not made bids for properties. Respondents were also given the opportunity to make comments and suggestions as to how they thought the scheme could be improved. The full report detailing the findings of the survey is available on request. The following are the key points highlighted by the survey:

-Overall 90% of the respondents (162) agree or strongly agree that Hampshire Home Choice is easy to access and understand.

-Nearly a third 31% (50) of respondent were aged 25-39

-88% (143) gave their ethnic group as White British.

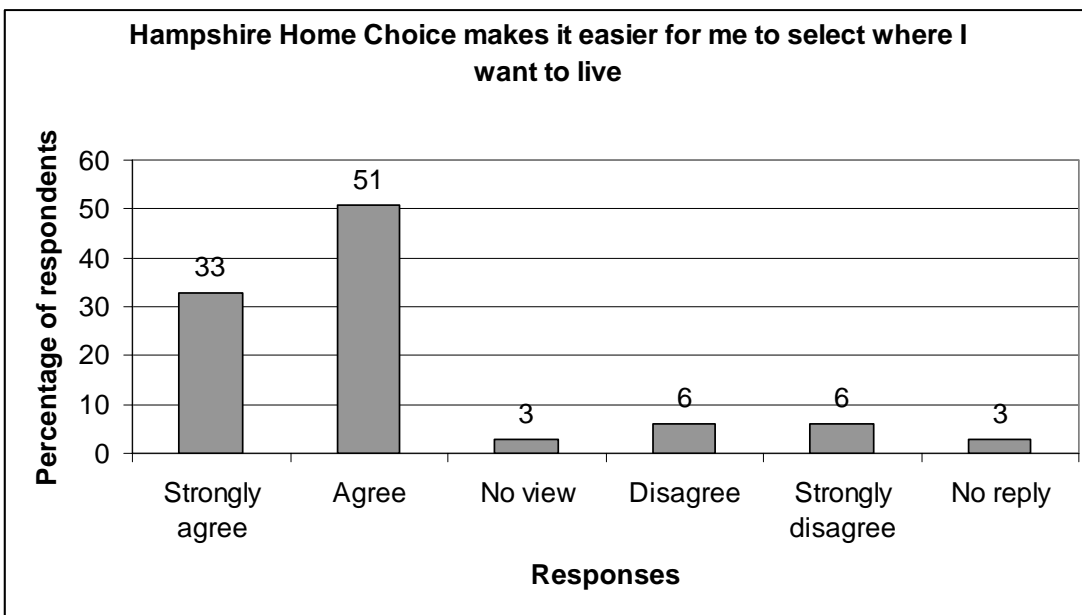
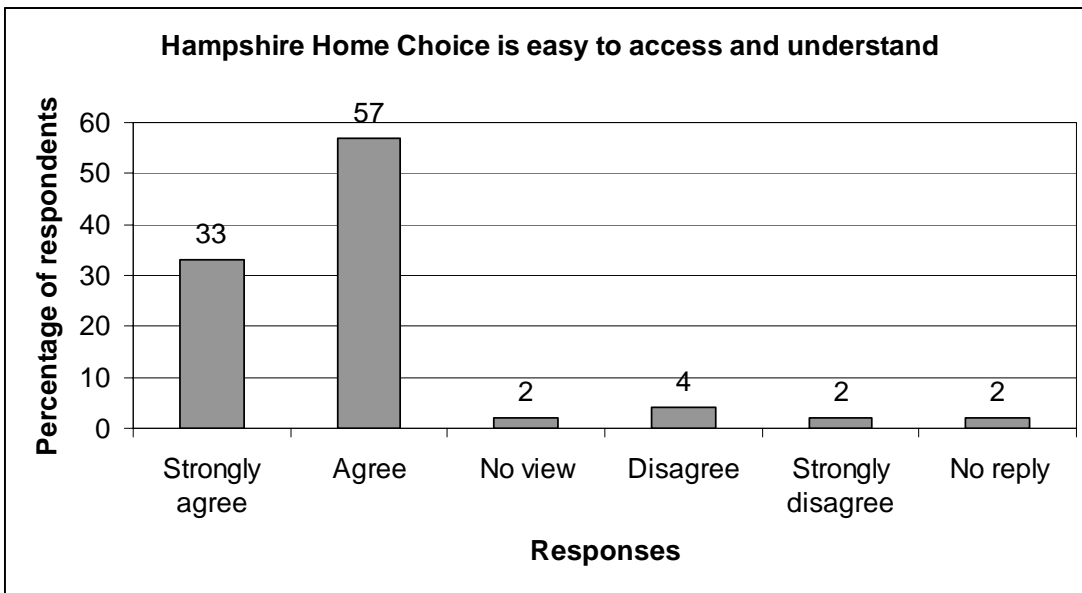
Such a high overall satisfaction rate is encouraging given that this scheme is a complete departure from the previous way of allocating social housing. This supports the shift in emphasis from the local authority control over nominations to allowing the customer to be pro-active via the bidding process in choosing where they want to live.

Some negative comments were received and these were mainly concerned with the availability of the Hampshire Home Choice scheme and its accessibility for customers who did not have access to the internet. The survey identified that 78% of respondents (141) did have easy access to the internet.

3.3 Ease of access

84% of respondents (150) strongly agreed that Hampshire Home Choice does make it easier to select where they wanted to live. Of these 48% were aged between 25-64 and 89% gave their ethnic group as White British.

Quite a high proportion of respondents, 37% (56) stated that they had a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity that limited their activities in some way. Again this is an encouraging response taking into account that one of the main principals of the scheme is to provide customers with more choice in where they would like to live. Of particular note is the fact that customers with disabilities felt the scheme offers increased choice. 71% of respondents (128) agree or strongly agree that Hampshire Home Choice is a fair system of allocating social housing.

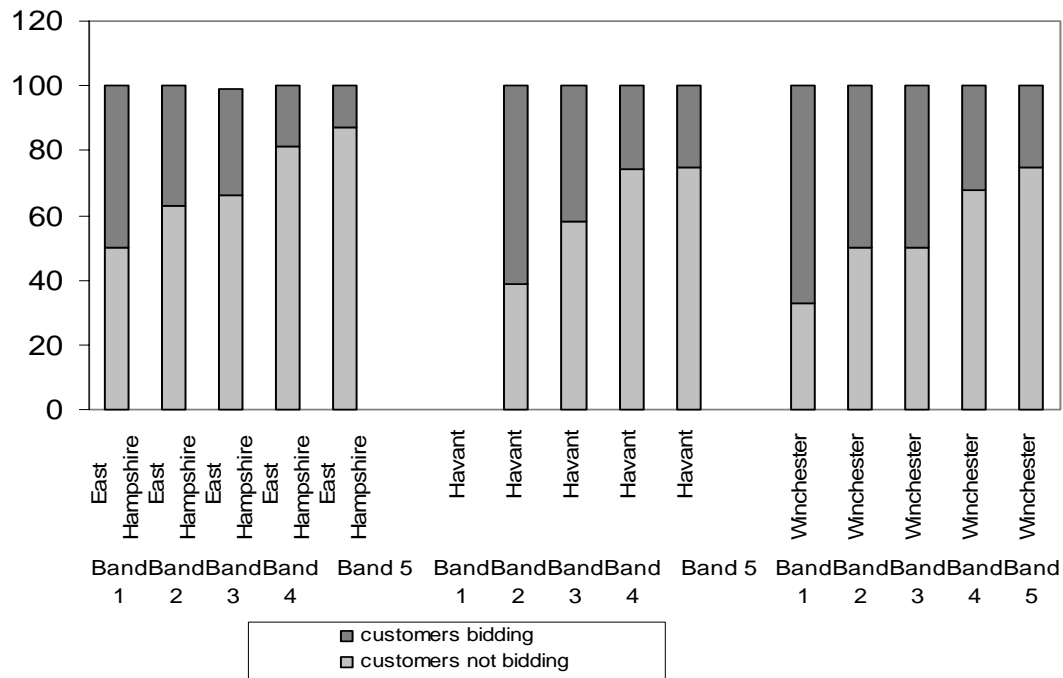


3.4 Bids made by customers
 41% of respondents (74) have not yet made a bid on a property. Of these, half said they were not in immediate housing need and an additional 36% (27) said it was for 'other' reasons that they were not bidding. This included customers who had already been housed, customers waiting to be assessed and people who were not able to bid because there were no properties advertised in rural areas. Only 4% of the responses stated that their lack of bids was as a result of not having internet access. However, when

asked about their preferred method of making bids it was very clear that for customers aged 55 and over, there is a higher proportion in this age group that would prefer to bid in person at the Council offices or by telephone. This directly correlates with the view that older people generally have less easy access to the internet.

It is difficult to assess whether this is good or bad performance and it is recommended that further work is undertaken to compare this performance with other sub regional schemes.

Percentage of customers bidding by band



Woolston Road, Havant Guinness Hermitage



Jodrell Close Horndean - Drum



4.0 Allocations Framework Review

4.1 The 2009/2010 Hampshire Home Choice Review has examined whether the Allocations Framework is compliant with 'Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England' issued by the CLG December 2009.

4.2 The Housing Act 1996 is the main statute regarding the allocation of social housing. The legislation focuses on the need to ensure that highest priority for social housing is given to those people in greatest housing need. To ensure that this occurs, legislation provides that local authorities must make sure that their allocation scheme allows 'reasonable preference' to be given to applicants within a set of categories:

- people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act)
- people owed a duty by a local authority (various homelessness criteria)

- people occupying unsanitary or overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing
- people needing to move on medical or welfare grounds, including disability
- people needing to move to a particular locality where failure to meet that need would cause hardship

In 2009 the government issued a Code of Guidance "Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England' to help Councils interpret the legislation. This new code has to be considered alongside the Allocations Code of Guidance 2002 and advice issued on Choice Based Lettings in 2008. The new "Fair and Flexible" guidance consolidates the guidance previously issued with regard to choice, access to social housing within a wider options framework, the principals of banding and cross boundary moves.

4.3 The guidance sets out the government's strategic view of the objectives and outcomes which local authorities must have, and those they should seek to achieve in their allocation policies.

This statutory guidance covers a number of issues:

(i) It sets out the Government's strategic view of the objectives and outcomes which local authorities must and those they should seek to achieve in their allocation policies. These are:

- providing support for those in greatest housing need, including people who have experienced homelessness
- ensuring allocation policies comply with equality legislation
- promoting greater choice for prospective and existing tenants
- creating more mixed and sustainable communities
- promoting greater mobility for existing tenants
- making better use of the housing stock

- supporting people in work or seeking work
 - delivering policies which are fair and considered to be fair
- (ii) It sets out the importance of local authorities' responsibilities under the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) to involve, inform and consult with local people; and it draws attention to the main legislative provisions governing the allocation of social housing, including the requirement to provide for 'reasonable preference'.
- (iii) It emphasises the importance of communicating facts about allocations (including regular updates on how properties have been allocated), to tackle false perceptions which may arise about the way social housing is allocated.
- (iv) It highlights the implications of the House of Lords judgment in the case of *R (on application of Ahmad) v Newham LBC*, which, among other things, removes the requirement to provide for cumulative preference to be taken into account in prioritising applicants.
- (v) It reinforces the flexibilities local authorities have within the allocation legislation to meet local pressures by:
- adopting local priorities alongside the statutory reasonable preference categories
 - taking into account other factors in prioritising applicants, including waiting time and local connection
 - operating local lettings policies
- (vi) It emphasises the importance of close working between authorities and registered social landlords.

4.4 The HHC Review has examined the Hampshire Home Choice Allocations Framework and compared the policy to the key issues in Fair and Flexible.

Fair and flexible Review	
Fair and flexible key issue	HHC Allocations framework
Providing support for those in greatest housing need, including people who have experienced homelessness	The Allocations framework prioritises those in exceptional need (band 1). The framework includes customers with reasonable preference categories in band 2 as well as people who are homeless.
Ensuring allocation policies comply with equality legislation	An equality impact assessment was completed in April 2009 and the action plan reviewed in March 2010.
Promoting greater choice for prospective and existing tenants	All customers may bid for properties in all three council areas.
Creating more mixed and sustainable communities	Around 10% of moves are cross boundary: no research has been commissioned as to whether tenants who have chosen their homes through HHC are more likely to settle and make a contribution to their community.
Promoting greater mobility for existing tenants	Tenants of social landlords are free to bid for all properties across the three council areas: around 25% of lettings go to transferring tenants.
Making better use of the housing stock	Increasing the pool of customers from three council areas has helped letting some more difficult to let properties although the letting of sheltered housing remains a significant problem.
Supporting people in work or seeking work	Customers who are working have the opportunity to move closer to their employment by being able to bid for properties in all three council areas, however, no priority is awarded for employment moves.
Delivering policies which are fair and considered to be fair	The allocations framework has been subject to considerable consultation and is freely available to customers. All vacancies are advertised and the HHC website publishes the results of all lettings.

<p>The importance of local authorities' responsibilities to involve, inform and consult with local people and the code draws attention to the main legislative provisions governing the allocation of social housing, including the requirement to provide for 'reasonable preference'.</p>	<p>When HHC was set up consultative forums were organised in the council areas and with the housing providers. The HHC allocations framework does give priority to all reasonable preference categories.</p>
<p>The importance of communicating facts about allocations (including regular updates on how properties have been allocated), to tackle false perceptions which may arise about the way social housing is allocated.</p>	<p>The HHC website provides weekly feedback information on all the lettings and this is accessible for all customers who log onto the site. A quarterly HHC newsletter is planned and the Annual Report will be circulated.</p>
<p>The implications of the House of Lords judgment in the case of <i>R (on application of Ahmad) v Newham LBC</i>, which, among other things, removes the requirement to provide for cumulative preference to be taken into account in prioritising applicants.</p>	<p>The HHC policy does give cumulative preference to multiple reasonable preference categories in band 2. The recommendation is that this is removed and that a waiting time preference is restored.</p>
<p>The flexibilities local authorities have within the allocation legislation to meet local pressures by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -adopting local priorities alongside the statutory reasonable preference categories -taking into account other factors in prioritising applicants, including waiting time and local connection -operating local lettings policies 	<p>The Allocations framework does take into account some local flexibility. The policy is e.g. specific about the requirements of rural housing (section 106 sites in East Hampshire and Winchester) service personnel (Winchester). Local lettings plans have been agreed for new affordable housing developments.</p>
<p>The importance of close working between authorities and registered social landlords.</p>	<p>HHC is a sub regional scheme requiring partnership working between the three councils and the housing providers. Winchester City Council landlord services and two housing associations are represented on the HHC Board and all providers participate in the HHC user group.</p>

4.5 The Review group have carefully considered the "Fair and flexible" statutory guidance and consider that the Hampshire Home Choice Allocations Framework is compliant with the code. The Review project team also recommends:

- removal of the cumulative reasonable preference in band two
- inclusion of a statement on people needing to be closer to their work

-that a working group is set up by representatives of providers to examine the letting of sheltered housing, and that the group reports back to the HHC Board in 2010/11.



Littleton Winchester – Hyde



5.0 Summary of the Review

5.1. High levels of customer satisfaction

90 % of respondents agree or strongly agree that Hampshire Home Choice is easy to access and understand, and 84% agreed or strongly agreed that Hampshire Home Choice does make it easier to select where they wanted to live. These high levels of customer satisfaction are a very encouraging reflection of the position after the first year and suggest that the original principles of the scheme have largely been met.

5.2. Increased choice

Choice Based Lettings provides an alternative to traditional systems for the allocation of social housing by allowing customers to choose where they would prefer to live, and gives customers the opportunity to make decisions about social housing based on clear information of all of the available options. Existing tenants are treated in the same way as new applicants to the scheme and up to date figures show that approximately 25% of all lettings in the last year have gone to transferring tenants.

As customers are able to bid for properties across all three local authority areas it does provide the opportunity for access to housing that under the old system would have not been available. This in turn should help to develop more sustainable communities although this will only be able to be measured in the long term.

The Hampshire Home Choice scheme has also introduced an option for customers to register for mutual exchanges and private sector lettings. The Review advises that further training for staff is planned to maximise the use of

this part of the scheme to enable consistent access for customers.

5.3. 'Fair and flexible'

'Fair and flexible' highlights many key issues that local authorities must, or should, take account of when reviewing their allocations framework. The table in the section 4.4 lists these issues, and reports on the responses detailed in the Hampshire Home Choice Allocations Framework. In most respects HHC can demonstrate that it is compliant with the statutory guidance. However, it is accepted that there is still work to be undertaken in respect of:

- Removal of the requirement to provide for cumulative preference to be taken into account in prioritising applicants.
- supporting people in work or seeking work

5.4. Refusal rate

The Review has highlighted the issue of the refusal rate. This is recognised as being a problem for landlords in reducing their void turnaround. A particular problem is associated with the letting of sheltered housing. Throughout the first year of Hampshire Home Choice a total of 349 studio and 1 bed properties were refused, with 202 of these coming from the Winchester area.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Refusal rate and sheltered housing

A Hampshire Home Choice working group will be established to examine ways of reducing the refusal rate. The group will be made up of representatives from landlords participating in the scheme and who manage those properties, which have a high refusal rate. The group will:

- analyse the refusal data
- examine good practice in the letting of sheltered housing
- examine the access older people have to Hampshire Home Choice
- consider options for the introduction of penalties for customers who refuse offers

The group will present their findings to the HHC User Group, HHC Officer Group and the HHC Board.

6.2 Cumulative Preference

The HHC Officer Group will be commissioned to carry out an examination of the cumulative preference awarded in Band 2. A detailed report on the impact of such a policy change will be reported to the HHC Board, detailing the options.

6.3 Supporting people in work

Whilst the HHC Allocations Framework does help some people in employment to move the scheme does not give additional priority. The review does not recommend changing the policy at present but to await further guidance from the new government as it is anticipated that further policy development may be required to accommodate a National Mobility Scheme.

21/05/2010

Julie Watson-Cowen Housing Enabling Officer Havant Council

[/reg/hs/d/d/hhc/hhc Review v5a](#)



Swanmore Winchester Hyde



Swanmore Winchester Hyde



Swanmore Winchester Hyde