

TORBAY COUNCIL

Report No: **110/2005**

Title: Homefinder Torbay Common Assessment Criteria

To: Executive on 17th May 2005

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To agree the Homefinder Torbay Common Assessment Criteria as the overall Allocations Policy for the operation of the choice based lettings scheme with effect from June 2005

2. Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The functions within this business unit contribute to the themes and priorities as listed below:-
- (i) Improving access to good quality affordable housing;
 - (ii) Community Plan theme 3.2.12 "to develop and implement a new choice based system for letting social housing in Torbay"; and
 - (iii) Transforming Torbay – theme 5 objective 3 – as above.

3. Recommendation(s)

- 3.1 That the Homefinder Torbay Common Assessment Criteria, for the operation of the choice based lettings scheme with effect from June 2005, set out at Appendix 1 to this Report be approved.

4. Reason for Recommendation(s)

- 4.1 The Common Assessment Criteria underpins the whole process of Homefinder Torbay. The Torbay Housing Partnership in conjunction with Ocean Housing has devised the overall assessment criteria. This assessment criteria replaces the current allocations policy agreed in 2003.
- 4.2 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has set targets to ensure that 25% of Local Authorities will be using Choice based lettings schemes by 2005 and 100% by 2010.
- 4.3 The Government is keen to see the development of regional and sub regional choice based lettings systems and early indications show Homefinder Torbay as a likely system for the South West.
- 4.4 Homefinder Torbay provides a new way of allocating social housing properties. The approach moves away from matching applicants to properties instead applicants will choose the property in which they want to live, however the system is still based on housing those people who have been waiting the longest and are in the most need.
- 4.5 All existing social housing transfers in Torbay will now have the right to apply for a transfer through the Torbay Homefinder scheme therefore widening the choice available to existing tenants.
- 4.6 Established choice based lettings schemes have reduced the number of properties which have been traditionally "difficult to let" as applicants are now able to bid for a wide range of properties, often outside their original area of choice. If an applicant chooses to move to a particular area it is helping to make those communities/neighbourhoods more sustainable.

- 4.7 The scheme and its Common Assessment Criteria is simpler to understand, more equitable and has the added benefit of developing an understanding of waiting times and regular feedback (with the two weekly advert) shows the length of time the successful applicant had been waiting and their level of housing need (gold, silver, bronze, i.e. high, medium and low housing need).
- 4.8 Once the scheme is operational from June 2005 further work will be considered to include the private sector landlords into the scheme, thereby improving the range of housing options to meet local housing need.

5. Key Risks associated with the Recommendation(s)

Likelihood	6	6	12	18	24
	5	5	10	15	20
	4	4	8X	12	16
	3	3	6	9	12
	2	2	4	6	8
	1	1	2	3	4
		1	2	3	4
		Impact			

Low risk
 Intermediate risk
 High risk

The "x" in the above matrix denotes where the author has assessed the level of final risk to fall

- 5.1 Provision of the service. The new system will effectively suspend the nominations agreement set up by the original transfer document. It gives Torbay Council the opportunity to develop a new service level agreement between ourselves and Riviera Housing Trust and improve on the original format before the system goes live in June 2005. These controls will reduce the risks.
- 5.2 The new system will be a complete departure from how current homeless and vulnerable clients are assisted through the current Housing Register. It will give the client groups far more choice in selecting the accommodation that they require but will mean they will need to be more pro-active.
- 5.3 The risks will be reduced by the development of procedures in conjunction with Supporting People and the Housing Needs Section assisting the homeless and more vulnerable clients
- 5.4 Legal. A new service level agreement between Torbay Council and Riviera Housing Trust will provide the controls to help eliminate the impact of this risk by providing clear parameters, monitoring procedures and time scales.
- 5.5 Reputation. The Common Assessment Criteria and the new Homefinder system will help eliminate the risks to Torbay's reputation and will enable applicants to view the system as clear and transparent
- 5.6 Strategic. The development of the Common Assessment Criteria by the Torbay Housing Partnership will enable Torbay Council to help minimise risk with regard to its allocations strategy as it will be able to update and respond more effectively to changes within Torbay.

6. Alternative Options (if any)

- 6.1 To maintain existing systems is not an option the Torbay Housing Partnership would countenance.
- 6.2 To explore other choice based systems, which would incur further cost and delay.

7. Background

- 7.1 The Torbay Annual Stakeholder conference June 2003 identified choice based lettings as the way forward.
- 7.2 The Council agreed the Revised Allocations policy in July 2003 as an interim arrangement pending a full review of the Allocations process, the contract with Riviera Housing Trust and consideration of options for the future including choice based lettings.
- 7.3 A review of the existing Housing Register, the management and contractual arrangements between the Council and Riviera Housing Trust, commissioned by Torbay Council in September 2003, found significant weaknesses in the current systems. The recommendations have informed the development of this Choice Based Lettings scheme.
- 7.4 'The Future of Housing in Torbay' A Partnership Strategy 2003-2006 adopted in November 2003 - Priority 3 'Move to an informed choice based system'.
- 7.5 Initial consultation took place in June 2004 with local housing agencies, which recommended that an action plan be developed in two stages – Consultation with a wide range of agencies, stakeholders and client groups operating in Torbay to gauge views and opinions. This took place between April and Aug 2004.
- 7.6 The Second Stage Aug 2004 to June 2005 was for the Torbay Housing Partnership to work towards developing Homefinder Torbay. The partnership set up a Steering Group with a Project Manager and a preferred partner Ocean Housing, who have experience of delivering Choice Based Lettings systems in Restormel, Caradon, and North Cornwall
- 7.7 Key Milestones which have been achieved so far include:-
 - (i) The agreement for Riviera Housing Trust to run the new system for 3 years as a pilot with the help and experience of Ocean Housing.
 - (ii) The agreement of all partners to the Common Assessment Criteria which is very similar to those already operating successfully in Cornwall.
 - (iii) The development of a new application from and literature for Homefinder Torbay.
 - (iv) The development of the Homefinder Torbay computer system located at Riviera Housing Trust, which is operational.
 - (v) The employment of a dedicated officer to administer the system from 18th April 2005.
 - (vi) Homefinder Torbay is expected to be operational from the beginning of June 2005.

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IMPLICATIONS, CONSULTATION AND OTHER INFORMATION

Part 1

These sections may have been completed by the Report author but must have been agreed by the named officers in the Legal, Finance, Human Resources and Property Divisions.

Does the proposal have implications for the following issues? If "Yes" - give details. <i>delete as appropriate</i>		Name of responsible officer
Legal	Yes. The Council has a legal responsibility for dealing with homeless people.	Bill Norman
Financial – Revenue	No	Martin Phillips
Financial – Capital Plan	No	Lynette Royce
Human Resources	No	Geoff Williams
Property	No	Sam Partridge
Procurement and Efficiency	No	Clare Armour

Part 2

The author of the report must complete these sections.

Could this proposal realistically be achieved in a manner that would more effectively: <i>delete as appropriate</i>		
(i)	promote environmental sustainability?	No
(ii)	reduce crime and disorder?	No
(iii)	promote good community relations?	No
(iv)	promote equality of opportunity on grounds of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief?	No
(v)	reduce (or eliminate) unlawful discrimination (including indirect discrimination)?	No

If the answer to any of the above questions is "Yes" the author must have addressed the relevant issue/s in the main report and have included a full justification and, where appropriate, an impact assessment.

Part 3

The author of the report must complete this section.

	<i>delete as appropriate</i>	If "Yes", give details
Does the proposal have implications for any other Directorates?	Yes	Care Trust, Children's Services

Part 4

Is this proposal in accordance with (i.e. not contrary to) the Council's budget or its Policy Framework?		<i>delete as appropriate</i>
		Yes
1.	If "No" - give details of the nature and extent of consultation with stakeholders and the relevant overview and scrutiny body.	
2.	If "Yes" - details and outcome of consultation, if appropriate. Initial consultation took place with a wide range of Agencies, stakeholders and client groups operating to gauge views and opinions and took place from April to August 2004.	

Part 5

Is the proposal a Key Decision in relation to an Executive function? (i.e. would generate expenditure or savings in excess of £100,000 or 20% of an approved budget OR affect more than 2,000 residents of the Borough.)	<i>delete as appropriate</i>	If "Yes" - give Reference Number
	Yes	X10/2005

Part 6

Wards

All

Appendices

Appendix 1 Homefinder Torbay Common Assessment criteria

Documents available in Members' Room

None

Background Papers:

The following documents/files were used to compile this report:

None