

9 January 2009

Ref: HD/Scrutiny/Jan09
Contact: Hilary Dineen
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To: The Members of the Scrutiny Committee of the North Hertfordshire District Council

(Councillors L.W. Oliver (Chairman); R.L. Shakespeare-Smith (Vice-Chairman); David Billing, John Bishop, S. Bloxham, P.C.W. Burt, Paul Clark, Sal Jarvis, Lorna Kercher, H.M. Marshall, Alan Millard, M.R.M. Muir, Elliot Needham and Michael Paterson).

[Substitutes: Councillors Judi Billing, John Booth, Lee Downie, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns and Paul Marment]

You are invited to attend a

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

to be held in

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON
ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

on

TUESDAY, 20 January 2009

at

7.30 p.m.

**[Note: A Pre-Meeting For Members Of The Committee Will Take
Place At 7.00pm In Committee Room 3]**

Yours sincerely,



David Miley
Democratic Services Manager

AGENDA
PART I

ITEM	PAGE
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	-
2. MINUTES – 9 DECEMBER 2008 To take as read and approve as a true record the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 9 December 2008.	-
3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chairman of other business which they wish to be discussed by the Committee at the end of the business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chairman will decide whether the item(s) raised will be considered.	-
4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from members of the public. At the time of printing the agenda, no requests to speak had been received. Public participation requests received within the agreed time will be notified to Members as soon as practicable.	-
5. URGENT/GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS The Chairman to report on any urgent or general exception items which required his agreement. At the time of printing the agenda, the Chairman had not agreed any urgent or general exception items.	-
6. CALLED-IN ITEMS To consider any matters referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to a call-in of a decision. At the time of printing the agenda, no items of business had been called-in.	-
7. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest can speak on the item, but must leave the room before the debate and vote.	-
8. QUESTIONS To receive and respond to any questions either set out in the agenda or tabled at the meeting.	1

ITEM	PAGE
<p>9. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT FORWARD PLAN: 1 FEBRUARY 2009 – 31 MAY 2009 <i>To note items on the Council's Forward Plan and to give consideration to any items set out in the Plan prior to a decision being made.</i></p>	9
<p>10. PRESENTATION BY PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS <i>To receive a presentation by Councillor Tricia Gibbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs.</i></p>	15
<p>11. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2008/2009 REPORT OF THE LEAD SCRUTINY DIRECTOR <i>To consider the issues that the Scrutiny Committee plans to review at future meetings and the activities of its sub-groups.</i></p>	17 [Report to Follow]
<p>12. SCRUTINY FINANCE SUB-GROUP REPORT OF THE LEAD SCRUTINY DIRECTOR <i>To receive recommendations from the Finance Sub-Group in relation to financial reports considered at its meeting held on 19 January 2009.</i></p>	19 [Report to be tabled]
<p>13. THE INTRODUCTION OF A COMMON HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME IN ORDER TO DELIVER CHOICE BASED LETTINGS REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH <i>To consider the implementation of a Common Housing Allocation Scheme that delivers the Choice Based Lettings mechanism for the allocation of Social Housing.</i></p>	21
<p>14 SCRUTINY – THE FUTURE <i>The Chairman to report on discussions with the PARC Chairman regarding the scope and future role of the Scrutiny Committee.</i></p>	51

The next Scrutiny Committee Meeting for the Civic Year 2008 – 2009 will be:

Tuesday, 24 March 2009

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<p style="text-align: center;">SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 20 JANUARY 2009</p>

<p>*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT</p>	<p>AGENDA ITEM No.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8</p>
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TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS

To consider any questions submitted by Members.

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TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS

The following questions had been submitted by Councillor David Billing at the Scrutiny Committee meeting which was held on 9 December 2008:

(A) Equality Standard

“NHDC has achieved Level 3 of the national Equality Standard. Therefore :

- a) what is its participation strategy for community, staff and stakeholder groups for setting employment and service delivery objectives?
- b) how many equalities impact assessments have been completed for race, gender and disability for employment, pay and service delivery, and what equalities objectives are based on these?
- c) what progress has it made on equality impact assessments for sexual orientation, age, and religion/belief for employment, pay and service delivery and what equalities objectives are based on these?
- d) can action plans be produced which translate these objectives into specific targets, and how far have these actions been progressed and scrutinised?
- e) how far advanced are information and monitoring systems to assess this progress in meeting targets?
- f) what work has been done towards NHDC achieving Level 4, in particular in using monitoring data to manage the equalities performance against targets, and when is it now proposed to demonstrate Level 4 has been attained?”

The Head of Policy Partnerships and Performance has provided the following response:

“I will answer this point by point starting with a clarification of our current level of the Local Government Equality Standard (LGES).

- 1) NHDC has achieved Level 3 of the national Equality Standard.

NHDC is not currently at Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard. The Council was audited at Level 2 of the Standard as at 31 March 2008. NHDC was at Level 3 against an earlier version of the Standard in 2005. NHDC is now aspiring to achieve the actions appropriate to Level 3 of the current LGES by 31 March 2009 though it will not be possible for the required independent assessment to be completed by that date (also see f below).

Therefore :

- a) what is its participation strategy for community, staff and stakeholder groups for setting employment and service delivery objectives?

Equality and Diversity issues are coordinated by the Council’s Corporate Diversity Group which has identified a number of key groups within the community with whom consultation and participation is carried out when

equality and diversity issues are considered, eg: North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum, JUCC, Staff Consultation Forum, use of web-site. Discussions are due to commence with the North Herts CVS as to how we might strengthen the consultation and participation arrangements especially with the voluntary and community sectors through a series of specific working groups to cover each equality theme.

b) how many equalities impact assessments have been completed for race, gender and disability for employment, pay and service delivery, and what equalities objectives are based on these?

In 2003, an initial schedule of 10 priority areas was identified in consultation with the Minority Ethnic Forum. At that time race was the focus for Equality Impact Assessments.

Since that time full Equality Impact assessments have been carried out for 22 service areas. A change of focus was to ensure all front facing staff completed impact assessments covering race, gender and disability.

The Council has now adopted a two stage process whereby all service areas will have an initial stage one screening but will complete a more in-depth stage two assessment only where deemed necessary. Both stages will cover all six strands of equality - race, disability, gender, age, faith/religion or belief and sexual orientation

The implementation of EIAs is designed to help meet the Council's Strategic Objective of: Targeting resources at areas of disadvantage in the district to reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for all of our citizens.

c) what progress has it made on equality impact assessments for sexual orientation, age, and religion/belief for employment, pay and service delivery and what equalities objectives are based on these?

The Council includes sexual orientation, age, religion and belief in its Stage 1 and Stage 2 process.

d) can action plans be produced which translate these objectives into specific targets, and how far have these actions been progressed and scrutinised?

Each Phase 2 EIA will have its own action plan and these are published on the web-site. A review of the current levels of action plans and their presentation is under way to make them more 'user friendly'. All Heads of Service have a responsibility for implementing and reviewing their EIA and a corporate programme of updating and review is under way, using a new EIA toolkit. The CDG has the responsibility for scrutinising the implementation of EIA.

e) how far advanced are information and monitoring systems to assess this progress in meeting targets?

In some areas, eg: Human Resources, there are well established information and monitoring systems, but in other service areas, the level of systems is less robust. Work is in hand arising from the recent Internal Audit of Equality and Diversity to strengthen this area.

f) what work has been done towards NHDC achieving Level 4, in particular in using monitoring data to manage the equalities performance against targets, and when is it now proposed to demonstrate Level 4 has been attained?

The aim of NHDC is to be ready for external inspection of Level 3 by 31 March 2009, but the actual visit is unlikely to be before September 2009, by which time a new, updated and revised Equality Standard, with 3 as opposed to 5 levels will be in place. Consequently, there will be no Level 4 or Level 5 performance standard to be attained.

Instead, the Level 2 on the current Standard is equivalent to the "emerging" on the new standard, while Level 3 of the current will be equivalent to "achieving" in the new standard."

The following questions have been submitted by Councillor David Billing:

(B) CADWELL LANE CROSSROADS

"What is the total likely available funding from all plausible sources, including Planning Obligations, which could be devoted to improving safety at the Cadwell Lane Hitchin crossroads by providing a pedestrian phase at the traffic lights? What would be the approximate cost, if it were decided to improve safety despite possible reduced traffic capacity?"

The Head of Planning and Building Control will circulate a response when it is available.

(C) SCRUTINY OBLIGATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES REGARDING COUNTY LED TEAMS

"What are the consequences, for NHDC's scrutiny obligations and opportunities, of the recent changes in the structures and accountabilities of the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership, the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and their District-level components - including Multi-Agency Support Teams?"

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services will circulate a response when it is available.

(D) SCRUTINY OF NORTH HERTS LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

"How and when is it proposed to scrutinise the effectiveness of the North Herts Local Strategic Partnership?"

The Head of Policy Partnerships and Performance has provided the following response:

"It is not possible to provide a simple answer in terms of an 'agreed date' for review of effectiveness of the LSP, given the changing nature of the performance, LSP and inspection agenda nationally, so I provide herewith additional background information of how the LSP is currently

reviewed/reports progress, and how this will be performed/enhanced in the future.

The North Hertfordshire Partnership agreed to be a pilot LSP in the Aspire 2 Perform self assessment programme. This was funded by GO-East and facilitated by an independent consultant towards the end of 2007 and early in 2008.

As a result the Partnership initiated a governance review which resulted in changes to the constitutional arrangements for the LSP. Amongst other things these are intended to improve the effectiveness of the Partnership in the delivery of the increased range of tasks required by central Government – both as statutory and non statutory guidance issued by CLG.

The changes were introduced in two stages at Board level but were not formally ratified until the Annual Community Conference on 10th November 2008. The new Sustainable Community Strategy was also launched at that event.

The changes include:

- Establishment of a Board and Executive structure. According to the LSP Terms of Reference the board is responsible for the strategic direction of the partnership. It develops the Sustainable Community Strategy and owns the Vision for the district. The smaller Executive makes recommendations to the board, carries out tasks delegated to it by the board, monitors and reviews the Sustainable Community Strategy and its action plans and assigns tasks to delivery partnerships.
- Agreement that the whole Board should be elected or appointed every year.
- Greater clarity as to how and why people are members of the Board and what their own role requires of them, not only at the partnership but within their own organisations.
- Membership of the Board enlarged to include the East & North Herts NHS Trust, Registered Social Landlords, the District Children's Trust Partnership, the Countryside Management Service, the Community Sports Network, the Arts Council for North Hertfordshire and young people.
- Enhanced involvement of the business sector through the four town centre partnerships.
- Links between the Executive and delivery partnerships related to the themes in the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- A declaration by all members of the Partnership Board.

The first meeting of the new Executive, organised according to the new Terms of Reference, is due to take place on Tuesday 13th January.

The reporting of performance of the LSP and delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy will continue to take place through an annual report to the LSP Conference each autumn, to the LSP members and others (published on the partnership website www.northhertspartnership.gov.uk) and through six monthly reporting as at present to PARC. The last report on the North Herts LSP/LAA development was made to PARC in November 2008.

In addition the introduction of Comprehensive Area Assessments from April 2009 will focus attention to North Hertfordshire as a 'place', to measure outcomes that matter to the wider community rather than processes of single agencies such as ourselves and will include the review of effectiveness of local partnership working in the whole, including the largest partnership, the LSP. Delivery against LAA targets forms part of the Council and partners' Comprehensive Area Assessment for the district. The final detail of how the area assessments will be carried out and finally scored is not yet available, but anticipated to be by the end of January 2009.

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TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS

The following questions have been submitted by Councillor David Billing:

(C) SCRUTINY OBLIGATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES REGARDING COUNTY LED TEAMS

“What are the consequences, for NHDC's scrutiny obligations and opportunities, of the recent changes in the structures and accountabilities of the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership, the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and their District-level components - including Multi-Agency Support Teams?”

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services has provided the following responses:

Response from the Chairman of the North Hertfordshire District Children's Trust Partnership

There are minimal changes to the NHDC Scrutiny obligations and opportunities arising from the recent changes and accountabilities of the organisational and structural arrangements of the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership. Comments from colleagues at the County Council explain the current position.

Comments from Natalie Rotherham, Scrutiny Officer, Hertfordshire County Council

HCC seeks to cooperate with partner organisations on matters of scrutiny and both HCC and districts/boroughs look to avoid duplication. In fact, the scrutiny of HCTP and HSCB features on the HCC scrutiny work programme for the spring. Members would be happy to consider issues raised by districts/boroughs and other partners involved in either Trust or Board.

Assuming that The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act will come into force once regulations have been issued (expected later this year), it is likely that HCC will continue the current arrangements, ie: that HCC will provide information requested to District Scrutiny Committees, although an officer does not have to attend. For the future, Members from both HCC and districts/boroughs have expressed interest in joint scrutiny; however, HCC would await regulations before progressing on this.

Comments from Andrew Wellington, Head of Children's Trust Arrangements

In general terms, the HCTP has always taken the view that District Council Scrutiny Committees had the right to scrutinise the activities of their District Children's Trust Partnerships, and this right is reinforced by the DCTPs now having a single line of accountability to the District LSP.

Regarding integrated practice, DCTPs are no longer **accountable** for ensuring the implementation of the integrated practice agenda and management of the MASTs (Multi Agency Support Teams) . The Director of Children's Schools and Families has the accountability, implemented through the Deputy Director as Outcome Lead.

Regarding Safeguarding, DCTPs have never been **accountable** for ensuring safeguarding at a district level. However, the DCTP Governance and Accountability Framework says that they support partner agencies working at District level in meeting their statutory responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children Act to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (e.g. by bringing the partner agencies together at local level, and facilitating joint working on a range of children's services issues including safeguarding). The Framework also requires them to take account of priorities in the county CYPP and HSCB Business Plan (e.g. when considering local planning and priority setting)

So, District Council Scrutiny Committees can scrutinise the work that their local DCTP has done to bring partners together to take forward children's priorities (including integrated practice and safeguarding) at **district** level. They cannot scrutinise the work of HCTP or HSCB (HCC Scrutiny Committee does this) or work that is done across the county.

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***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

8 E

TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS

The following question has been submitted by Councillor Paul Clark:

(E) PARKING RESTRICTIONS

“In how many locations in the district are parking restrictions unenforceable due to defective traffic regulation orders and what steps are being taken to address this issue?”

The relevant Head of Department will circulate a response when it is available.

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***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

9

TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT FORWARD PLAN: 1 FEBRUARY 2009 – 31 MAY 2009

To note items listed on the Council's Forward Plan and to give consideration to any items set out in the Plan prior to a decision being made.

The Forward Plan is attached, together with the list of Pending Items.

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

DRAFT Forward Plan of Key Decisions – 1 February 2009

The Forward Plan contains brief details of Key Decisions that the Council is likely to take over the next four month period. You will also find details of contacts who can provide further information and hear your views. **Please note that the dates of some of the decisions may change from month to month, please check with Committee Services on 01462 474403 before deciding to attend a meeting.**

Decision required and date first appearing on Plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Main Consultees	Method of Consultation	Relevant Documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder and Contact Officer
Members' Allowances Scheme 2009/10 12/08		Council (via Cabinet)	5th Feb 2009 (via 16 th Dec 2008)	Independent Remuneration Panel	Meetings	Revised Members' Allowances Scheme	TBA	Cllr F.J. Smith david.miley@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474208
3 rd Quarter Capital Budget 2008/09 Spend Profile 11/08	Scrutiny Committee (via Scrutiny Finance Sub)	Cabinet	17 th Feb 2009	Budget Holders; HoSG CMT	Meetings	Budget Papers	£10.9M estimated programme 2008/09	Cllr Terry Hone tim.neill@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
3 rd Quarter Revenue Budget 2008/09 Spend Profile 11/08	Scrutiny Committee (via Scrutiny Finance Sub)	Cabinet	17 th Feb 2009	Budget Holders; HoSG CMT	Meetings	Budget Papers	£17.7M net estimated annual budget 2008/09	Cllr Terry Hone tim.neill@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Leisure Management Contracts - Service Profiles and key changes to contracts 11/08		Cabinet	17 th Feb 2009	Portfolio Holder	Meetings	Leisure Management Contracts	TBA	Cllr Ian Knighton steve.crowley@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474211
Intermediate Inter-Authority Agreement for Waste – HWP 01/09		Cabinet	17 th Feb 2009	Hertfordshire Waste Partnership - HWP	Various meetings	Herts Waste Strategy 2007, Outline Business Case from HCC to DEFRA	Not known at this time	Cllr Lynda Needham vaughan.watson@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474641

Decision required and date first appearing on Plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Main Consultees	Method of Consultation	Relevant Documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder and Contact Officer
Use of Compulsory Purchase Powers – The Wynd area, Letchworth GC TC 12/08		Council (via Cabinet)	26 th Feb 2009 (via 17 th Feb 2009)	Portfolio Holder Letchworth Area Committee	Meetings	Relevant planning application /indemnity agreement	Cost neutral	Cllr Richard Thake david.scholes@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474836
Asset Management Plan – Annual Review 09/08	Scrutiny Committee (via Scrutiny Finance Sub)	Cabinet	31 st Mar 2009	Asset Management Group	Meetings	Asset management database.	£65million asset value	Cllr Terry Hone barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Disposal at discount - land at Radwell. 01/09		Cabinet	31 st Mar 2009	Ward Member & Baldock Area Committee	Meetings	Estate Papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
New Customer Service Strategy and updated Customer Care standards 05/08	PARC	Council (via Cabinet)	31 st Mar 2009	Customers Staff CMT	Via the Citizens Panel, Staff Survey and meetings	Previous Customer Care Strategy and Standards	Contained within existing budgets	Cllr Bernard Lovewell lynn.saville@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474530
Great Ashby Rural Resource Centre Consideration of implications of feasibility study 10/08		Cabinet	31 st Mar 2009	Local Residents, Ward Members Portfolio Holders Southern Rural Committee	Meetings	Feasibility Study once complete	TBA	Cllr Lynda Needham Cllr Ian Knighton Cllr Tricia Gibbs andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474272

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PENDING ITEMS

Decision required and date first appearing on Plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Main Consultees	Method of Consultation	Relevant Documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder and Contact Officer
Adoption of Green Space Strategy 10/07	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	June 2009	Portfolio Holders – Leisure & E-Government and Waste & Recycling	Meetings	NHDC Green Space Strategy	Capital - £100K p.a. Revenue - £50K p.a.	Cllr Richard Thake Cllr Lynda Needham Cllr Ian Knighton steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474553 louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
Climate Change Strategy 11/07	Scrutiny Committee	Council (via Cabinet)	June 2009	Community groups; Partners; Residents; Parish Councils; LSP Members	Meetings and consultation events; Draft report to April Cabinet	Draft Climate Change Bill 2007; Nottingham Declaration	TBA	Cllr Claire Strong jim.brown@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474835
Building Control Policy 12/08		Cabinet	June 2009	Portfolio Holder Customer Liaison Panel	Meetings		TBA	Cllr Richard Thake ian.fullstone@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 476 370
Final accounts closure & Annual Statement of Accounts 2008/09 01/09	Scrutiny Committee (via Scrutiny Finance Sub)	Cabinet	June 2009	Budget Holders; HoSG CMT	Meetings	Budget Papers	£17.7M net estimated annual budget 2008/09	Cllr Terry Hone tim.neill@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Capital programme outturn 2008/09 01/09	Scrutiny Committee (via Scrutiny Finance Sub)	Cabinet	June 2009	Budget Holders; HoSG CMT	Meetings	Budget Papers	£10.9M estimated programme 2008/09	Cllr Terry Hone tim.neill@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Submission Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) 05/08	Scrutiny Committee (TBC)	Council (via Cabinet)	June 2009	Community Groups; Residents; Parish Councils; LSP Members	Online consultation; Written comments; Press Release	Submission DPD	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317

Decision required and date first appearing on Plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Main Consultees	Method of Consultation	Relevant Documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder and Contact Officer
Submission Development Policies DPD 05/08	Scrutiny Committee (TBC)	Council (via Cabinet)	June 2009	Community Groups; Residents; Parish Councils; LSP Members	Online consultation; Written comments; Press Release	Submission DPD	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Preferred Options Land Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) 02/08	Scrutiny Committee (TBC)	Cabinet	TBA	Community Groups; Residents; Parish Councils; LSP Members	Online consultation; Written comments; Press Release	Preferred Options DPD	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Baldock Air Quality Management Area 01/08		Cabinet	TBA	Portfolio Holder				Cllr Bernard Lovewell andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Comprehensive Equality Policy 07/07	Scrutiny Committee	Council (via Cabinet)	TBA	Community groups; Residents; LSP Members; Partners	Meetings and consultation events	Race, Disability & Gender Equality Schemes	TBA	Cllr John Smith liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474230

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

AGENDA ITEM No.

10

PRESENTATION BY THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS

PRESENTATION BY COUNCILLOR TRICIA GIBBS, THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS

This Item will take the format of an oral presentation.

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TITLE OF REPORT: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report presents the policies and topics that the Scrutiny Committee plans to scrutinise. The report also updates members on the work of the scrutiny sub groups.

2. FORWARD PLAN

2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

20 Jan 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cllr Tricia Gibbs, Community Engagement & Rural Affairs Portfolio Holder▪ Adoption of the Choice-based Lettings Scheme▪ Resource implications for Task and Finish Groups▪ Scrutiny - the Future
24 Mar 09	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cllr Claire Strong – Policy and Green Issues Portfolio Holder (TBC)▪ Sheltered Housing Scrutiny Review - <i>Portfolio Holder response to Task & Finish Group's recommendations</i>▪ Review of Scrutiny Task & Finish Group outcomes▪ Annual Report

4. SUB GROUPS

4.1 Task and Finish Groups

4.1.1 The report of the **Economic Development and Town Centres Scrutiny Task and Finish Group** is due to be considered by the Council's Corporate Management Team on 13 January and by Cabinet on 27 January.

4.1.2 The **CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group** met for the first time on 6 January and agreed the Group's scope and work programme. It is intended that the Group will complete its work and prepare a report by the end of May 2009, with a report to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet possible in June 2009. Meetings are scheduled for 7.30 pm on the following days:

- Friday 30th January NB visit to CCTV control centre (provisional)
- Monday 2nd February
- Tuesday 3rd March
- Tuesday 17th March
- Monday 6th April

- Tuesday 28th April
- Wednesday 20th May (provisional)

4.1.3 Members will need to decide which topics task and finish groups should consider in 2009/2010. It is unlikely that a new task and finish group will start before July 2009. A paper setting out officers' detailed comments on and resource implications of topics suggested by members at last year's workshop is attached at annex 1. Members may also wish to suggest new topics in the light of changed circumstances.

4.1.4 Members also resolved to take part in a joint working party convened by the Portfolio holder for Policy and Green issues be requested to convene a joint working party to consider actions required for the Climate Change Strategy.

4.2 Finance Scrutiny Sub Group

Finance Sub Group Work Programme 2008 - 2009

Date	Time & room	Agenda item:	Scrutiny	Cabinet
19.01.09	6.00pm CR3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corporate Business Planning (Budget) ▪ Capital Programme 2009/10 onwards 	20.01.09	27.01.09
16.02.09	6.00pm, CR3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3rd Quarter Revenue Budget 2008/09 ▪ 3rd Quarter Capital Budget 2008/09 ▪ S106 monitoring (PARC report) 	N/A	17.02.09
23.03.08	6.00pm CR3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Procurement Strategy (annual review) ▪ Financial Regulations & Contract Procurement Rules (annual review) ▪ Staff time apportionment (request from the Scrutiny Committee – 01.04.08) ▪ Asset Management Plan (annual review) 	24.03.09	31.03.09

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members are asked to:
- note the Scrutiny work programme for 2008/09; and
 - consider which Task and Finish Groups it may wish to undertake in 2009/10.

6. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 To enable the Scrutiny Committee to plan and carry out its workload efficiently and effectively.

7. APPENDICES

- 7.1 Resources for Task and Finish Groups

8. CONTACT OFFICERS

8.1 Norma Atlay
Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services
Scrutiny Lead Director
01462 474297
norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk

8.2 Brendan Sullivan
Scrutiny Officer
North Hertfordshire District Council
01462 474612
brendan.sullivan@north-herts.gov.uk

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Resources for Task and Finish Groups

TFG	Officer comments	Participants
<p>1. Revisit major policy changes to monitor effectiveness & look at progress made</p> <p>a) Customer Services</p>	<p>Suggest Scrutiny should look at Customer Service post introduction of CSC not just the CSC. Resources for this could be made available subject to appropriate timing and scope.</p> <p>We are currently updating our corporate Customer Service Standards and Strategy. We are looking at the robustness of our reporting of performance against these service standards and looking to continue with a programme of more services being supported by the CSC following Business Process Improvement reviews.</p> <p>The disruption to customer service would be too great if the review was programmed during the period of end/start of year (Council Tax billing) or Elections (June) or early Jan (waste collections) . However July - November would be a possibility window for this work, subject to being able to work around the holiday period in August, which will limit the availability of key staff and customers. The team does have a fairly full programme of change that needs to be managed in order to meet customer service needs over the coming year. However believe that a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group would be possible with careful planning and scheduling.</p>	<p>Lead officer(s): Lynn Saville</p> <p>Participants: Customer Service Team (Manager, Deputy, Team Leaders and Staff Members). Those services who have transferred responsibility for their service or part of it to be discharged via the CSC. Consultation Officer (Citizen Panel) Hard to reach focus groups), IT service provider. Stakeholders-councillors, other service providers etc dependant on the scope of the review</p>
<p>b) Housing & Environment Health –</p>	<p>Could not be undertaken at present. The current recruitment difficulties within the Service have made it difficult to provide non-statutory services. However, should matters improve then I would be happy to participate in a review, subject to its relevant to the mission of this Service.</p>	<p>Lead officer(s): Andy Godman</p>
<p>c) Fly-tipping</p>	<p>There would be limited value in a review at the moment as the enforcement of fly-tipping is rapidly improving.</p>	<p>Lead officer(s): Andy Godman</p>

d) Waste collection	See section 9 below	Lead officer: Vaughan Watson
e) Constitution	The Constitution is routinely reviewed each year and revisions agreed by full Council. The is not a policy matter nor subject to an executive decision, thus it is beyond the scope of the scrutiny committee.	Lead officer(s): Kim Sawyer, David Miley
2. Facilities for teenagers (possible joint review with Hertfordshire County Council)	There have been a number of Youth Reviews since the original FSR in 2002/3 the outcomes of which have been signed off by PARC. This work is now being picked up by the District Children's Trust Partnership. HCC have just completed a major restructuring of their Youth and Connexions services so that these will need time to bed in during 2008/9. Another review would be of limited value and would likely deflect what limited officer time we have from actually making service provision and implementing the outcomes of earlier reviews. A review of this nature would be more appropriate in 2010/11 when the changes around ECM and the DCTP will have had more time to become embedded.	Lead officer(s): Patrick Candler Participants: Head of Service, Children and Young People's Development Manager, CDOs, DCTP staff, Youth Service Staff, Scrutiny Officer
3. Parking in residential areas	TFG cannot be accommodated within existing work programme due to existing service commitments and street scene FSR.	Lead officer(s): David Scholes Vaughan Watson
4. Green issues and the Council's carbon footprint (CO ² emissions)	Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Climate Change Strategy in December 08 and it was agreed that a working group should be formed to further develop and finalise the climate change strategy before submission to Cabinet in June 2009. It is therefore questionable what added benefit a review would add at this stage. There would be a need to call on officers from a number of other areas, so this would need to be scheduled alongside their own work commitments too.	Lead officer(s): Liz Green Resources: Potentially, all Heads of Service, Policy Manager, Property Manager, and officers managing external contractors (leisure facilities, grounds maintenance, waste etc) to be involved
5. Does the provision	CMT has recently agreed to start the development of a Sports	Lead officer(s): Lynn Saville

<p>of sports facilities meet the needs of communities (eg. youth, low income families, rural/urban areas)</p>	<p>Facilities Strategy which will cover much of this ground. We are working on this with the support of Sport England and some consultancy provided as part of the Facilities Improvement Service. Initiation meeting took place in December and the Council is working on the scope which we expect to have ready in January 2009. The work is expected to conclude in December 2009. However there will be an opportunity for Members to be involved in the consultation sessions for this work Scrutiny for the Strategy is expected to be provided by PARC ahead of formal recommendation to Cabinet and Council.</p>	<p>Participants: Contracts & Projects Manager, Contracts and Projects Officer, Children and Young Persons Development Manager, Properties Manager, Planning Officer, Parks & Countryside Development Manager, Genesis, Sport England, HCC</p>
<p>6. Can the Council support / help to retain local community events</p>	<p>The Community Development team supported more events than ever before during 2008. The SAT (Safety Advisory Team) is working well and the SAT guidelines have been revised recently and the SAT application is currently being looked at, as is improved publicity and promotion. The prospect of a TFG takes staff away from supporting those groups who want to put on events, which is very much a community development role and not Licensing & Enforcement one. We need to keep the functions separate. There will be even greater difficulties accommodating a TFG with Patrick Candler's departure from NHDC. It is unclear at the moment as to how this area of work will continue to be resourced through Community Development. There would also be resource problems in partner agencies eg the police, HCC, Fire, Paramedics. The SAT has organised some specific briefing sessions for organisers of larger events so they are aware of what is required of them.</p> <p>On the licensing and enforcement side, a review cannot be accommodated at present. Recruitment difficulties have made it difficult to provide non-statutory services. The licensing of community events is heavily governed by the Licensing Act 2003 et al, so any review should be directed at how organisers of such events can be</p>	<p>Lead officer(s): Patrick Candler (CD) Participants: Community Development, Licensing and enforcement, Police, Fire, HCC, Highways.</p> <p>Andy Godman (L & E)</p>

	encouraged to submit sound applications and then to comply with the requirements of any licence granted. Summer time is the Licensing and Enforcement Team's busiest period so a review should avoid this period. It may be possible to accommodate one after October 2009.	
7. CCTV strategy	Chosen for 2008/09. First meeting arranged for 6 th January 2009. No further comments needed.	Lead officer(s): Andy Godman
8. Increasing public involvement in the work of Scrutiny	This could be good – perhaps an engagement review which includes aspects such as attendance at meetings, councillors surgeries, participation in consultation events	Lead officer(s): Liz Green?
9. Commercial waste and recycling; waste collections	A task and finish group is part of our work programme to be managed by our project board next year. Given the breadth of the subject and to avoid duplication, the Head of Service has suggested that "Trade waste" is considered as a task and finish group as there are some interesting issues that need to be considered and discussed and such a review would add value.	Lead officer(s): Vaughan Watson
10. Services for 50+ and reviewing the existing strategy	<p>Head of PPP - This fits perfectly with the development of the community strategy theme for "older people". We need to develop three year action plans and consider how the activities required of us can be resourced across the authority, especially since we have reduced resources of 0.5 FTE.</p> <p>Head of Community Development – The district-wide conference was held in June 2008 and proved to be successful. The 50 Plus worker post has now been subsumed into that of CDO and she is currently preparing her 50 Plus Strategy. The involvement of scrutiny will help build on work started originally through the older person FSR. If the scoping is well thought through at the outset, there should be no operational constraints.</p>	Lead officer(s): CDO Lead not known & Liz Green Participants: 50 Plus Officer, CDOs, Careline Manager, Customer Services, Housing, Scrutiny Officer

TITLE OF REPORT: FINANCE SCRUTINY SUB-GROUP MEETING – 19 JANUARY 2009**1. BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2009/10**

1.1 The Head of Financial Services reported that the budget for next year has now been calculated, taking into account the latest changes in interest rates. The budget gap of £240,000 identified in December has now risen to £620,000 necessitating additional savings to those already proposed in order for the Council to achieve a balanced budget. A number of new proposals were being suggested in the following areas:

- £100,000 from review of the management structure
- £145,000 from increasing the vacancy control target from 3% to 4% of the total staff budget by extending the delay in appointment from 3 months to 4 months, ;
- £65,000 from capitalisation of salary costs of staff engaged in the administration of Disabled Facility Grants;
- £50,000 from reversing part of the base budget reduction in the Car Park income and PCN income targets, reflecting a rise in car parking enforcement income in the past few months;
- £20,000 from reconsideration of the efficiency proposal rejected by Cabinet in October, namely removing the Area Committee budgets on highway matters;
- £95,000 from rationalisation of Museum service provision
(Note Following further discussion and review of the details of the estimates saving possibility, it is likely that this item will be reduced to £50,000 in the budget papers being despatched for Cabinet on 27th January 2009)

1.2 In addition to these efficiency proposals, a number of further measures were proposed to balance the budget namely:

- increasing Council Tax by 4.5%
- lowering the budget assumption of the pay award in 2009/10 from 2.5% to 2%;
- CMT has recommended the reduction of investment proposals from £444,000 to £250,000; and
- retaining the proposed increase in car parking charges, taking into account three years of inflationary increases was still proposed. A separate report would go to Cabinet next week.

1.3 The Head of Financial Services explained that the reduction in the Council's reserves and the estimated budget gap of £1,263 million in 2001/11, meant that achieving a balanced budget for 2010/11 would be particularly challenging. As a result of this:

- CMT had identified that all services will need to be reviewed between now and June 2009 to assess what scope there is to make efficiencies, ceasing to provide a service or mothballing a service until the financial position improves; and
- It was important that the process of re-provision of Museum services to produce savings as identified in the Museums FSR be brought forward to 2009/10.

- 1.4 Members noted that the Museum revenue proposal would be combined with making a commitment in the Capital Programme to bring forward the scheme to replace the Burymead Road Storage facility with a new Resource Centre on a site in Letchworth. The Head of Financial Services explained there was a risk that the full saving from Museums proposal might not be achieved in 2009/10 due to consultation time-scales. Members highlighted their concerns that:
- the process was properly planned;
 - affected staff were kept informed;
 - the positive aspects of the new, improved facility were highlighted; and
 - the Heritage Foundation was properly engaged.
- 1.5 On the increase in vacancy controls, members considered it was essential to keep tight control of costs to ensure that savings from vacancy costs were not swallowed up by increased allowances and overtime, and employment of consultants, agency and temporary staff.
- 1.6 Members noted that many of the Council's investment proposals would not go ahead, eg the car park re-surfacing and re-lining. Members said it was worth re-considering whether a relatively small investment would help to increase both income and economic activity, and thought it was important that the Council's objectives remained joined up.

2 PROVISIONAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2009/10 TO 2012/13

- 2.1 The Capital Programme report seeks Cabinet's approval for a number of matters, namely:
- Statutory and Strategic Investment proposals totalling £0.630million;
 - A revaluation of the cost of provision of new office accommodation;
 - Reduction of £1.5million in partnership scheme funding of Housing;
 - Re-provision of museum services totalling £3.5 million;
 - Investment in two play area developments following the successful application for Play Pathfinder Status;
 - Investment in Baldock Road Play Area for which S106 monies has been secured; and
 - A revised timetable for the disposal of those assets identified for disposal.
- 2.2 The Accountancy manager reported that there had been a re-valuation in the cost of provision for the new Council accommodation. The spread of spend was now expected over the period 2009/10 and 2011/12.
- 2.3 Members noted that the largest source of funding was from capital receipts and that the capital programme was dependent on the Council achieving asset disposals.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Sub-group recommended that Cabinet:
- Ensure that the Museum service re-provision was properly planned, that staff and the Heritage Foundation were properly engaged and that the positive aspects of the new, improved facility were highlighted;
 - That tight control of staff costs are put in place to ensure that savings from vacancy controls and staff efficiencies are fully realised; and
 - Ensures its objectives remained joined up when considering whether relatively small investments which are proposed to be dropped might not increase both income and economic activity if they went ahead.

4. CONTACT OFFICER

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TITLE OF REPORT: THE INTRODUCTION OF A COMMON HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME IN ORDER TO DELIVER CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet’s approval for the implementation of a Common Housing Allocation *Scheme* that delivers the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) mechanism for the allocation of social housing.

2. FORWARD PLAN

2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 1st November 2008.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of its drive to increase choice in the delivery of public services the Government requires all local authorities, acting in their capacity as the Local Housing Authority (LHA), and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to operate a Choice Based Lettings scheme for the allocation of all social housing by 2010.

3.2 Choice Based Lettings is the Government’s term for housing allocation mechanisms that incorporate a high degree of applicant choice that encourage the better use of housing stock while continuing to meet local housing need. Current research suggests that CBL schemes ensure more sustainable tenancies and help to build inclusive local communities. CBL schemes effectively pass the responsibility for housing decision making to the applicant thereby giving them a greater stake in their future home and community. Appendix 1 contains more information on the key characteristics of a CBL scheme.

3.3 The key conclusion from Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance is that the responsibility for CBL implementation rests with the LHA, even where that LHA no longer retains or manages its own stock.

3.4 The North Hertfordshire Housing Partnership (NHHP) was formed in June 2005. The members are North Hertfordshire District Council, Howard Cottage Housing Association and North Hertfordshire Homes. A Common Housing Register (CHR) was developed and this enables housing applicants to join the waiting list by approaching *any* of the partners. All partners have access to a shared housing software system provided by Scout Solutions Ltd (“Scout”).

- 3.5 The delivery of CBL features in the Council's Corporate Plan 2005-2015 under the strategic priority of 'Creating Equal Communities'. In September 2007, Cabinet agreed the Council's participation in the CBL scheme operated by Stevenage Homes Limited (SHL). SHL is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) which is wholly owned by Stevenage Borough Council (SBC). Cabinet agreed the Common Housing Allocation Policy (CHAP) in September 2008; the latest version incorporates the necessary elements to introduce Choice Based Lettings.
- 3.6 The SHL CBL scheme is run on a system managed by Locata (Housing Services) Ltd ("Locata"). Locata are the largest central lettings agency for choice based systems and housing systems in the country, owned by social landlords and run as a not-for-profit organisation. Locata currently works with over 60 local authorities and 130 RSLs in the provision of social housing lettings solutions.
- 3.7 The Common Housing Allocation Policy will be implemented by the NHHP around March or April 2009. The majority of the additional elements to this policy document concern the implementation of CBL. Should Cabinet agree the adoption of the proposed CBL scheme, below, this will operate from June 2009.
- 3.8 The proposed CBL scheme will feature the following key stages:-
- An applicant applies to join the CHR;
 - The application is assessed in terms of housing need (in accordance with the prevailing CHAP) and registered with appropriate priority;
 - The applicant is informed of the awarded level of priority and the size and type of property for which s/he can bid;
 - Vacancies are advertised via a variety of media, labelled with information on location, size, type, rent, council tax band, and any special criteria;
 - Applicants register a bid for their desired property via a range of communication mechanisms;
 - All bids are shortlisted;
 - Bidders with highest priority are invited to a viewing of the property;
 - The property is offered to the bidder with the highest priority (subject to a satisfactory viewing);
 - An offer is accepted and tenancy subsequently commences;
 - Anonymised lettings outcomes are published regularly to give feedback and also to help applicants gain an idea of their chances of being offered accommodation.

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 SHL have developed a brand for their CBL scheme called 'Home4U'. The NHHP will operate under the same brand and will initially share the associated website and publicity under this identity. Home4U is the mechanism for delivering CBL. Available properties will be advertised in the fortnightly Home4U magazine, to be distributed in locations around the area (or posted to applicants where necessary). Properties will also be advertised on the Home4U website (also available via links from the website of the NHHP organisations). Customers will express their interest in a property ('bidding') in a variety of ways e.g telephone, text, via the website, by letter. SHL find that over 90% of bids are via the website. Applicants with support needs will be identified, and support will be provided to assist with bidding, as necessary, to ensure fair access to properties. Applicants can bid for more than one property per fortnight.

- 4.2 In order to implement the CHP, the Scout system requires upgrading to reflect the updated prioritisation criteria. The provider for the CBL system, Locata, has advised that they can provide the same CHR functionality for less overall cost than the current supplier, Scout. In addition to this, Locata will provide on-line access for applicants to the Common Housing Register as part of the final product whereas the Scout system does not include this functionality as yet.
- 4.3 Under CBL the lettings process itself is driven by the applicant as the new method of property matching will be, with some rare exceptions (see 4.4 and 4.5), customer centric. Safeguards do, however, need to be built in to the process in order to protect the interests of potentially disadvantaged applicants. Assistance will be provided at an appropriate level to the applicant's needs by NHHP officers and/or statutory and voluntary support and advice agencies. Please find attached the draft Vulnerability Strategy (contained within Appendix 2) that outlines the key issues and their corresponding control measures.
- 4.4 Households accepted under homelessness legislation and provided with temporary accommodation will be given a priority under the CHP to enable them to bid for available properties. If an applicant does not bid for available properties within six months of the homelessness decision, a direct offer of a property may be made to an applicant.
- 4.5 There may be an occasional need to offer properties directly to applicants rather than via the CBL scheme. The NHHP retains the right to make a direct offer of a property where there is an exceptional need for this as agreed between the appropriate manager in each partner organisation. In NHDC, the appropriate manager will be the Head of Housing and Environmental Health (or other manager designated by the Head of Housing and Environmental Health, acting with delegated authority).

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Terms of Reference for Cabinet state that it should develop the policy of the Council in relation to housing matters including enabling and provision of housing and homelessness.
- 5.2 Section 4 of the Homelessness Act 2002 confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA) under the Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1).
- 5.3 Section 14 (1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 provides that LHA are no longer required to maintain a housing register. However, Section 167 (1) of the Housing Act 1996 states that every LHA shall have a scheme for determining local priorities and the procedure to be followed in allocating social housing.

5.4 Section 16 (3) of the Homelessness Act 2002 sets out revised categories of applicants who must be given reasonable preference in social housing allocations. These are:

- people who are homeless;
- people owed certain homelessness duties;
- people living in unsatisfactory housing conditions (including unsanitary or overcrowded housing);
- people with a particular need to move on medical or welfare grounds; and
- people with a particular need to move to avoid hardship to themselves or others.

5.5 Section 167(1A) of the Housing Act 1996 states that an allocation scheme should include a statement of the LHA's policy on offering people who are to be allocated housing accommodation -

- (a) a choice of housing accommodation; or
- (b) the opportunity to express preferences about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them.

5.6 Choice Based Lettings Schemes are the Secretary of State's view as to how s167 Housing Act 1996 should be interpreted.

5.7 The Council has had regard, in accordance with s169(1) and (2) Housing Act 1996 to the Code of Guidance for the Allocation of Accommodation, Choice Based Lettings (August 2008)

5.8 S168(3) Housing Act 1996 requires the Council, where the scheme is altered to reflect a major change in policy, to take reasonable steps to bring the effect of the alteration to the attention of those likely to be affected by it.

5.9 The Council will ensure that appropriate contractual or other agreements are entered into between NHHP and SHL, and NHHP and Locata, as necessary.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The total implementation (i.e. start-up) costs to join the SHL CBL scheme are estimated to be £35k in 2008/9 for NHHP. Subsequent running costs have been estimated at £38k per annum.

- 6.2 These costs are to be divided amongst the members of the NHHP: the Council's commitment would be expected to be half of all costs, i.e. £17.5k for the implementation phase and £19k per annum for IT support, printing, advertising and marketing thereafter. The budget for the implementation of the CBL system with SHL was agreed as part of the Council's Business Planning process in 2007/8. Accordingly, the CBL scheme proposed within this report is fully funded for 2009/10 and beyond.
- 6.3 The procurement and implementation of the Locata system represents a risk for the Council. It is anticipated that the new system can be funded from current budgets by recycling the funding currently allocated the Scout system. Due to the lower annual costs for the Locata system and the cost sharing arrangements with members of the NHHP, the annual system cost to the Council will be *lower* than the existing outlay.
- 6.4 The implementation of CBL represents a significant risk for the Council – it has therefore been recorded on the Council's Risk Register: risk number 378.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The only staffing implication arising from this report will be the change of emphasis from the running of the current system of property nomination to the provision of support to applicants so as to enable them to make appropriate decisions on which properties to bid for. Due to other duties, it is not anticipated that this implication will create a significant change to current roles.
- 7.2 Equality of access to the CBL scheme is paramount to its ultimate success and the draft Vulnerability Strategy in Appendix 2 outlines how the NHHP will tackle this. The Stevenage Homes 'Home4U – Scheme User Guide' in Appendix 3 illustrates the measures that are currently undertaken.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 A consultation questionnaire was sent in June 2008 to all applicants registered on the CHR, the North Hertfordshire Minority Ethnic Forum, Disability Forum, and a sample of new tenants for HCHA and NHH and the Citizens Panel. Responses were largely favourable to the common allocation policy.
- 8.2 The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Lovewell, has been consulted on the development of the proposed CBL scheme. Likewise, the Shadow Portfolio Holders, Cllr Grindal and Cllr Body, have both been appraised of developments concerning this project.
- 8.3 A stakeholder event was held 8th August 2008 and attendees included RSLs, the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Leaving Care Service and the Mental Health Team.
- 8.4 A focus group regarding the introduction of Choice Based Lettings was held for service users on 17th November 2008. Attendees were very supportive of CBL. Attendees were satisfied that the proposed variety of ways in which applicants would be able to find out about available properties and then place bids was fully comprehensive.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That North Hertfordshire District Council, as part of the North Herts Housing Partnership, proceeds with the introduction of the 'Home4U' CBL scheme as outlined in 4.1 to 4.5, above.
- 9.2 That any minor amendments to the adopted Common Housing Allocation Policy or Scheme required to implement CBL be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health in conjunction with the Head of Housing and Environmental Health.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 CBL is a mandatory requirement for all LHAs and Registered Social Landlords by 2010.
- 10.2 CBL offers significant benefits to those seeking social housing in the District. It places the customer at the centre of the allocation process and will deliver sustainable housing outcomes.
- 10.3 By harnessing a web based software package (Locata) those on the CHR will be able to establish their priority for accommodation relative to others on the register without the need to contact officers within the Council's Housing Options Team. This is likely to reduce the number of avoidable contacts with the Council as measured by NI14.
- 10.4 Since the implementation of CBL carries with it significant risk, its implementation via a collaborative relationship with SHL (already a CBL provider) is likely to mitigate this risk to an acceptable level without incurring undue cost for the Authority. The risk of implementation failure is also reduced via the proposed collaboration with SHL as the project does not involve an unmanageable number of partners.
- 10.5 The proposed joint working with NHHP / SHL provides for significant cost sharing across the NHHP. Cost reductions will be achieved in practice by a) increasing the purchasing power of the partnership, and b) exploitation of economies of scale in relation to printing, advertising, etc.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 11.1 That the Council maintains its current CHP and does not pursue CBL in any form. Whilst this is the least financially costly option, it has not been proposed since it would leave the Council open to criticism/censure that it has not provided a form of CBL by the mandatory deadline of 2010.
- 11.2 That the NHHP delivers CBL directly. This option was explored, but was not pursued since it represented a high cost / high risk approach since there were limited opportunities for cost sharing and the assimilation of experience from an existing CBL provider.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix 1: What is Choice Based Letting ?
- 12.2 Appendix 2: Draft Vulnerability Strategy
- 12.3 Appendix 3: Stevenage Homes 'Home4U – Scheme User Guide'

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14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 14.1 Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance, November 2002, ODPM
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/allocationaccommodationcode>
- 14.2 Draft Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings Code of Guidance, January 2007, DCLG
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/housing/consultationallocation>
- 14.3 The Homelessness Act 2002
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020007_en_1#pb1
- 14.4 The Housing Act 1996, Parts VI and VII
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts1996/ukpga_19960052_en_1

- 14.5 Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings – Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities, August 2008, DCLG
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/lettingscodeguidance>

What is Choice Based Lettings?

The basic principles are as follows:

- The traditional points system for assessing need is changed to a simplified banding system. Bands are ranked reflecting overall housing needs. This is not however a prerequisite for CBL as some schemes have continued to operate with traditional points schemes.
- Vacancies are advertised in the local press, specially produced magazine, a website etc. and are 'sign posted' as being available only for applicants in band 'X' or 'Y' etc.
- Applicants themselves have to apply by expressing an interest in the properties they wish to live in either by phone, bidding cards or in the Internet. Applicants effectively, have to balance and choose whether to apply for low or high demand property in low or high supply areas knowing their own banding and relative priority.
- The advertising also incorporates information about the environment around-distance to shops, schooling situation etc as well as information about the property itself.
- To ensure the scheme operates efficiently a strict 'apply by' date is incorporated in adverts.
- Actual offers are made to the applicant in the band with the highest need and who has waited the longest in that band.

A Choice Based Lettings scheme should also be flexible enough to adapt to changing demands (i.e. during a crisis in temporary accommodation it would be possible to advertise more properties as available to homeless households only) and priorities (i.e. local lettings policies based on sustainability criteria can also be used).

There are some clear advantages to CBL. Firstly, by giving feedback to applicants on how advertised properties were let it makes the allocation process open and transparent. Those waiting for housing can see exactly how many properties become available for letting and have a better understanding of why they must wait. The pilot schemes have also demonstrated a positive impact on void turn around time. The fact that applicants only bid for properties they wish to live in increases the acceptance rate. Multiple viewings can also be used for hard to let properties, where several bidders are invited to view.

The following information details some of the factors influencing the NHHP decision to recommend approaching SHL for collaboration over the implementation of CBL:

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CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

NORTH HERTS HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

STRATEGY FOR MEETING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Background

Purpose of this strategy

How will fair and equal access for all be achieved?

Diversity and inclusion

How will vulnerable applicants be identified?

Potential barriers to people accessing CBL

Potential barriers to people accessing CBL – solutions

Applicants who do not bid

Who will give support to vulnerable applicants?

Support accessing information

Support in bidding

Support in decision making

Viewing and accepting properties

Monitoring

Appendix 1 – Process of CBL

Appendix 2 – Agencies supporting vulnerable applicants

Background

A partnership of North Hertfordshire District Council and two Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners, Howard Cottage Housing Association and North Herts Homes, is implementing a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme by 2009 in line with Government targets. The partnership is called the North Herts Housing Partnership.

CBL fundamentally changes the way that households will be able to access social housing. Previously, applicants would apply to the Common Housing Register, priority would be awarded by a housing options officer and the applicant would wait to be made an offer of a property, usually a maximum of one or two. Because North Hertfordshire is a region of high demand with a shortage of social housing, a large percentage of people on the register are waiting several years for a property and some are unlikely to be offered a property, so would be waiting for years with no realistic prospect of being offered social housing

The assessed level of housing need of each household determines access to social housing. The introduction of CBL does not affect the way in which this is assessed. All applications will be assessed in accordance with the partnership's Common Housing Allocations Policy.

CBL means that applicants will be more active in searching for vacancies and 'bidding' for properties they feel would be more suitable for their needs. Available properties are advertised, by means of a 'freesheet' publication and on the internet and applicants can 'bid' for properties that they are interested by a variety of means: on the internet, by post, telephone or text message. Applicants are then notified whether or not their bid has been successful and priority level of the bids are published.

It is recognised that some vulnerable people may find it difficult to access housing through CBL. This strategy seeks to ensure that vulnerable people seeking rehousing have fair and easy access to take part in the CBL scheme, in accordance with the 2008 Communities and Local Government Code of Guidance on CBL.

CBL is merely a mechanism for matching people seeking re-housing with vacant properties and ensuring that those with the greatest level of need are given priority. Even though applicants may be vulnerable, they may not have a high priority for housing so may not have a high chance of securing a property.

The issue of raised expectations must be considered; this may impact on some groups who are encouraged to access the system, but do not have enough priority to be housed. Some applicants may find this more difficult than others, and may lack the knowledge or capacity to find other solutions to their housing need. It is, therefore, crucially important that CBL is integrated as part of the wider housing options approach, which encompasses the private rented sector, shared ownership etc.

Section 166(1)(b) of the Housing Act 1996 Act requires a housing authority to secure that any necessary assistance is made available free of charge to persons in its district who are likely to have difficulty in making an application without assistance. Paragraph 6.9 of the Allocations Code provides that, where authorities adopt an allocation policy which requires the active participation of housing applicants in choosing their accommodation, the level of assistance needed by those who are likely to have difficulty in making an application will normally be greater, and housing authorities will need to provide for this.

Purpose of this Strategy:

- To identify barriers to the participation of vulnerable people in CBL
- To ensure that vulnerable people are empowered to have control over their housing options and are able to exercise choice about where they live
- To identify ways in which the scheme can enable vulnerable people to participate in CBL
- To ensure information on vacant properties is as accessible as possible
- To identify who will provide support and the necessary type and level of support for applicants who may need it
- To train and advise statutory and non-statutory agencies in understanding the CBL process for the purpose of advocacy and bidding for their service users
- To provide information about CBL in a range of formats to meet the needs of vulnerable people.

The aim of this strategy is to ensure that all applicants have fair and equal access and are able to participate in CBL.

How will fair and equal access for all be achieved?

- Ensuring that all applicants are given equal opportunities to benefit from the CBL process
- Ensuring that vulnerable people are able to achieve similar or improved outcomes under the CBL process and are not disadvantaged
- Ensuring that vulnerable people are able to access a similar proportion and quality of available properties as they did under previous allocation systems
- Ensuring that people who are in need of support are matched with the appropriate level of support to access CBL
- Identify who would provide the support to individuals

Diversity and inclusion

The aims of valuing diversity and inclusion run through this strategy. It is important to ensure that people are encouraged to engage with NHHP services in the first place. One of the barriers to members of black and minority ethnic communities accessing services could be due to language problems or cultural differences. The availability of language line services and use of interpreters where available, perhaps through working with community groups who are able to translate and act as advocates, will be encouraged and publicised.

How will vulnerable applicants will be identified?

Vulnerable people need to have the same access to choice. There are three issues around CBL which could impact on vulnerable people:

- Accessing information on housing options
- Bidding
- decisions and strategies for bidding.

In terms of support needs to participate in CBL, the following groups are generally considered to be vulnerable:

- Older people
- People with a learning disability
- People with mental health issues
- Homeless households
- Young people or care-leavers
- People with substance misuse issues
- People who have recently left an institution or rehabilitation
- People with medical issues
- Physical disability
- Visual impairment
- People who have literacy problems
- People from Gypsy and Traveller communities
- People who are suffering/have fled domestic violence or other serious harassment
- People who do not speak English as their first language
- People who are vulnerable through their offending behaviour

These groups are largely identical with the groups identified under the Supporting People Programme as having specific and identifiable vulnerabilities that render them in need of housing related support services provided for the purpose of developing a person's capacity to live independently in accommodation or sustaining his/her capacity to do so.

It should not be assumed that persons in the above groups are automatically vulnerable; for example, older persons may be active retired people who are quite able to access any information. Some people who are not included in the above groups will need support too. Therefore every applicant must be considered as an individual. However, it is important that the appropriate support is in place to ensure accessibility for all, should this be required.

Information will need to be given in various languages and formats as required, in order to be fully inclusive, together with well-publicised access points to that information for applicants and other agencies to access.

Potential barriers to people accessing CBL

The existing system of allocating housing to vulnerable people already presents considerable barriers and hurdles, e.g. completing application forms, providing documentation. In this process, support agencies already have a major role in helping vulnerable people through the process. These agencies will have a critical role in future arrangements.

The following measures should be taken to address potential barriers an applicant can face in order that appropriate support is provided.

- Noting difficulties in completing the application form. This will trigger contact to see if there are any barriers
- Support agency named on application form or where a support worker/friend or relative has completed the application form on behalf of the applicant
- A referral or expression of concern from a support agency
- Monitoring of bidding, e.g. person(s) with high need not bidding or where bidding has changed can trigger a further assessment
- Enabling and assisting as part of housing related support that is provided under Supporting People

Potential barriers to people accessing CBL - solutions

People can have combinations of barriers, for example, a translation or interpreter service will be available to those who do not speak English, but this will not help those with literacy issues as well. Therefore, a combination approach using different methods and staff from both the North Herts Housing Partnership and support agencies may sometimes have to be offered. For example:

- Unable to read: could be visual impairment/learning difficulties. Support staff can give information verbally to applicant, can produce large print information, training support workers in CBL process.
- English not a first language. Use of Language Line, training staff at Minority Ethnic Forum in CBL process.
- Unable to hear. Supply specific information for the individual applicant in writing, sign language interpreter, training support workers in CBL process
- Mobility issues. Could be frail older people or people with physical disabilities. Can arrange telephone advice for applicant or home visit where necessary. Training support workers in CBL process.
- Difficulty in understanding/processing information eg learning difficulties or mental health issues. Assistance from NHHP staff and training for support agencies in CBL process to enable them to assist their clients
- Chaotic lifestyles: could be misuses of drugs/alcohol, mental health issues. Assistance from NHHP staff and training for support workers.
- Unable to use telephone, internet or text: assistance from NHHP and support workers

Applicants who do not bid

If non-bidding is identified, the applicant concerned will be contacted if they could reasonably be expected to be a successful bidder (for example, those in the top bands with the highest points, or seeking non general needs accommodation). The reasons for their non-bidding will be discussed with them and they will be helped to identify solutions

Who will give support to vulnerable applicants?

As there are time constraints and pressures for staff from other agencies, support agencies will not be identified as a sole source of help unless the applicant is unable or unwilling to engage with NHHP staff, and has issues that another agency would also be able to help them with.

It is recognised that continual information and training regarding CBL will be necessary to take account of staff changes within all agencies.

Partnership working is crucial in supporting vulnerable applicants. A list of agencies available to support applicants is given in Appendix 2.

Support in accessing information

There will be a variety of sources of information, and information will be given in various formats. Information will relate to what properties are available and how to bid.

- Internet: access from any computer to the NHHP CBL website. Additionally, internet access via a link from the websites of North Herts District Council, North Herts Homes and Howard Cottage Housing Association. Computers and assistance will be available to the public in the reception areas of the offices of the NHHP.
- Email: freesheet details of available properties can be emailed to applicants
- Freesheets advertising properties available at various public locations throughout North Herts: libraries, shops, post offices, offices of the NHHP. The freesheets will state clearly, with use of symbols, the features of the properties available, using photographs, floor plans and rooms sizes where possible. Where necessary eg in isolated areas or with mobility issues and without access to internet, can request that the freesheet is posted to them.
- Leaflets available from NHHP offices explaining how the CBL system works and how applicants can bid for a property.
- NHHP staff will be give information verbally, in interview, on the phone, by letter, as necessary.
- The bidding cycle will be well publicised and clearly set out to avoid confusion.
- Agencies (statutory and non-statutory) and support workers can access CBL information.

Support in bidding

Advocacy bidding will be allowed on an informal basis to make use of existing networks of informal support from family, friends, and neighbours. If NHHP staff and other agencies are required to give information, there is a formal procedure to ensure confidentiality and consent to disclose information. Advocacy will also be supplied by supporting agencies.

There will be a range of methods to bid, which may include:

- Website
- Automated telephone
- Contact with the NHP offices in person, by telephone, by email, by post
- Text bidding.

It will be important for staff and support workers to identify people who may need support around accessing bidding, e.g. ability to use the internet, text lines etc. Housing staff will be available to assist people with the bidding process. They will also encourage people to make use of all the bidding options available to them, so if their circumstances change or one method is no longer available to them, they will be able to use another. As part of their role, they will help any people having trouble engaging with CBL, by identifying suitable properties and encouraging participation.

Applicants in supported housing seeking to move on through the CBL bidding process should be supported by their support workers.

Support in decision making

NHP will provide publicity and for their staff and support agency staff, including providers of supported housing, to equip staff to support applicants

For those who cannot/will not exercise choice, there may be an automatic bidding facility. NHP may choose to offer a property directly for those with high priority who do not engage. Applicants are not required to accept a property.

Viewing and accepting properties

Notification of viewing times should be made in the most appropriate manner (not necessarily by post) for the applicant. The support worker should be notified at the same time as the applicant. Vulnerable applicants may need additional time to view, to make transport arrangements, enable support worker to attend viewing with the applicant. Vulnerable applicants may need a second viewing eg with occupational therapist. They may need additional time to make the decision whether to accept the property.

Vulnerable applicant may need extra time to move in, to arrange removals, adaptations, security.

Monitoring

A system to monitor and review CBL needs to be set up so that information can be gathered on how the system is working for vulnerable applicants and support agencies.

There will be monitoring procedures to check whether people from certain categories who are expected to encounter barriers are able to achieve:

- Similar or improved outcomes under CBL
- Similar properties and quality of properties
- Similar or higher levels of customer satisfaction.

To ensure this service is available to all sections of the community, rates of access by different groups will be monitored.

APPENDIX 1

CHOICE BASED LETTINGS PROCESS

1. Applicant applies to join the Common Housing Register, by on-line application or be application form, supplying all necessary information and documentation
2. Application is assessed and registered with appropriate priority. Applicant is informed of priority and size and type of property for which he can bid
3. Available properties are advertised, labelled with information on location, size, type, rent, council tax band, and any local lettings criteria
4. Applicants register bids on properties. Bids are shortlisted.
5. Bidders with highest priority are invited to viewing of property. If still interested, the property is offered normally to bidder with highest priority after checks on applicant's eligibility and circumstances
6. Offer is accepted and tenancy commences

APPENDIX 2

**AGENCIES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE APPLICANTS
WITH ASSISTANCE IN THE CBL PROCESS**

Age Concern
Children Schools and Families Herts CC
Citizens Advice Bureau
Community Drug and Alcohol Team
Community Mental Health teams
Community Support teams
Connexions
Drugline
Elderly and Physical Disabilities team Herts CC
Hightown Praetorian floating support
HYHG floating support
Independent Domestic Violence Advisers
Learning Disabilities Team
Leaving Care team
Living Room
North Herts Sanctuary
Powher
Probation service
Shelter
SPH floating support
Springboard Housing
Turning Point
Youth Offending Team

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STEVENAGE
HOMES



Home4U

www.home4U.org.uk

Version 01 | 22.12.06



Scheme User Guide



Home4U

helping you find a home in Stevenage

Do you need us to explain Stevenage Home4U?

The Customer Service Centre deals with most enquiries about Stevenage Homes including Stevenage Home4U. If they are unable to deal with your enquiry they will transfer you to a member of the Housing Needs Team who will be able to help.

Contact the Customer Service Centre on **01438 242666** or textphone **01438 242150** (for people who are Deaf or have hearing difficulties). Or visit the Customer Service Centre on Danestrete (to the left of HSBC) and speak to a member of staff. Or you can log onto:

www.stevenagehomes.org.uk or **www.home4u.org.uk**

There is a document reader in the centre that reads text aloud and this is free for you to use and there are computers in the centre for you to place your bids online.

We can make information available:

- In large print
- On audio (information on CD)
- In different languages.

If you have any other requirements, please contact us to discuss alternative ways of getting Home4U. We will do our best to help.

Content

How Home4U works	p4
The points Scheme	p6
Where to get Home4U	p7
The adverts	p8
The feedback	p8
Bidding	p9
Which property can I bid for	p11
General Information	p12

SCRUTINY (20.01.09)

Translation Facilities

We can make published information available in different languages, Braille and large print upon request. We also have interpreting facilities for people who do not speak English. Telephone 01438 242242 or Textphone 01438 242555 for information.

আমরা মুদ্রিত তথ্যাবলী প্রকাশ করতে পারি যা অনুরোধক্রমে বিভিন্ন ভাষায়, ব্রেইলে এবং বড় প্রিন্টে পাওয়া যাবে। যারা ইংরেজী বলেন না তাদের জন্য আমাদের অনুবাদকের সুবিধাও রয়েছে। তথ্যের জন্য ফোন নম্বর 01438 242242 বা টেক্সটফোন নম্বর 01438 242555।

我们可以应需求，以各种不同的语言，布莱叶盲文以及大字体格式来制作出版资料。我们还可以为那些不会说英语的人士提供便利的口译服务。请致电 01438 242242 或拨打文本电话 01438 242555 来获取相关信息。

विन्ती मुजब प्रकाशित थयेव माडिती अमे जूदी जूदी भाषामां, ब्रेईलमां अने मोटा अक्षरना मुद्रणमां उपलब्ध करावी शक्रीं छींअ. अंग्रेज भाषा न ओरनार लोक्रीं माटे अमारी पासै दुभाषियानी सेवा पडै छै. माडिती माटे फोन करी 01438 242242 अथवा टेक्स्टफोन 01438 242555.

अनुसोध करने पर हम प्रकाशित जानकारी को विभिन्न भाषाओं, ब्रेल और बड़े अक्षरों में उपलब्ध करा सकते हैं। हमारे पास अंग्रेजी न बोलने वाले व्यक्तियों के लिए बुभाषिया की सुविधा भी है। जानकारी के लिए 01438 242242 पर टेलीफोन करें या 01438 242555 पर टेक्स्टफोन पर बात करें।

आमीं घेनती बीते नाट उे, वंघे वंघे भासादां, घरेल छिपी अउे वंघे पिंतां विंच छुपलघप सुचना हूपदा सकटे रां। साडे बेल छुगनां लकां दासउे दुभाषीआं सुदिपादां वी गन सिगडे कि अंगरेजी नगीं घेछटे। नाटकाची छैट छछी 01438 242242 उे देन करे नां 01438 242555 उे अंधरदेन ची दरउे करे।

ہم درخواست کرنے پر مختلف زبانوں، بریل، اورچھاپے کے جلی حروفوں میں شائع شدہ مواد فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔ ہمارے پاس انگریزی نہ بولنے والے افراد کے لئے ترجمانی کی سہولت بھی موجود ہے۔ معلومات کے لئے ٹیلیفون 01438 242242 یا ٹیکسٹ فون 01438 242555 پر بات کریں۔

OPENING HOURS

Walk-In Centre

Monday to Friday 8.30am – 5.30pm

Telephone

Monday to Friday 8.00am – 6.00pm

POWERED BY



Welcome to the Home4U User Guide

Helping you find a new home in Stevenage

Home4U is Stevenage's new Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

For the past three years, studio and one-bedroom flats have been allocated through a very successful Choice Based Lettings scheme. This scheme, now named Home4U, is being extended so that all council homes will be let in this way.

Home4U gives you more choice about where you want to live. In the past you may have waited on the Housing Needs Register until the council selected a property for you. Now you can decide which properties you would like to be considered for.

Asking to be considered for one of the homes advertised is called 'bidding'. Later in the guide we will show you the different ways you can bid for a property.

Home4U is available to everyone on the Housing Needs Register, including:

- Transfer Applicants - existing tenants who would like to transfer to a new home
- Homeseekers - new applicants who are waiting on the Housing Needs Register

All council properties will now be allocated in this way so if you want to be re-housed by Stevenage Homes you will have to take part.

The feedback section of the Home4U magazine will help you to understand the housing situation in Stevenage.

You will be able to see how many properties of each type are available, how many people have applied for them and the band and points level of successful applicants.

If you decide that you may not be successful you can look at other ways to solve your housing difficulties.

You should be able to find all the information you need in this guide, but if you have any questions about Home4U you can contact the Customer Service Centre or the Housing Needs Section of Stevenage Homes. Contact details are available in this guide, the Home4U magazine, and also at www.home4u.org.uk.

SCRUTINY (20.01.09)

APPENDIX 3

Five steps to a new home

Step 1:

Membership

You are automatically a member of Home4U if you are accepted onto the Housing Needs Register.

Step 2:

Registration

Once you have applied and been accepted onto the Register you will be registered on the Home4U scheme and allocated a unique Home4U number.

Step 3:

Choosing & Bidding

You can see the available properties on the Home4U website, or in a copy of the free Home4U magazine available throughout Stevenage. If you find a property you would like to move to then as long as you are eligible, you can bid for it.

Step 4: Offers

If your bid is at the top of the list we will invite you to view the property. If you like it and, after all the usual checks, you are eligible, we will offer you the property.

Step 5: Feedback

In every edition of Home4U we will publish the results of the previous bidding cycles, including how many people bid for each property and the band and points level of the successful bidder.

How Home4U

With the Home4U choice based lettings scheme, instead of us allocating you a home, you will look for your own home in the Home4U magazine.

There are five steps for you to follow in choosing your new home:

Step 1 – Membership

You are automatically a member of Home4U if Stevenage Homes accepts you onto the Housing Needs Register, which it manages on behalf of Stevenage Borough Council.

If you need information about whether you are eligible to go on the Register please contact Stevenage Homes.

Step 2 – Registration

Once your completed application has been assessed and you have been included on the Register, we will write to you and tell you your registration date, which band you are in and how many points you have.

We will also tell you the size of property you are eligible for, and your unique Home4U number. You will also be sent a copy of the user guide and a batch of postal bidding coupons.

If there are any changes to your household, accommodation or personal circumstances you must contact Housing Needs at Stevenage Homes and let us know. You may have to complete another form and provide us with evidence. It is very important that we know as it may change your band, points level, or the type of home you can move into.

Step 3 – Bidding

Available properties are advertised:

- In a free fortnightly magazine called 'Home4U', which is available every other Friday.
- On the website at www.home4u.org.uk from every other Thursday to the following Wednesday at 2.00pm

Your bids must reach Home4U by 2.00pm on the Wednesday

The adverts give you information about each property available for letting and we will include a photograph and floor plan if available.

You can pick up a free copy of the magazine from several places across town including the Customer Service Centre and Community Centres (full list, including opening times, see page 9).

You can bid for up to 3 properties in each magazine.

You can bid in 4 ways:

1) On the internet – go to www.home4u.org.uk and log on with your unique Home4U number and your date of birth – just follow the instructions on-screen.

2) By telephone – Call 09062 942 030 and follow the instructions. See page 12 about bidding by telephone. Calls cost 25p/minute.

3) By text message – Send your message to 07781 472726. See page 13 about bidding by text.

4) By coupon – When you are first registered we will send blank coupons with your registration pack. Your coupons have your name and Home4U number printed on it. This number is unique to you so no one else can use your coupons. See page 13 about how to complete your coupon.

To request more coupons you can tick the relevant box on the coupon before posting it, visit the Home4U website or contact the Customer Service Centre.

works

Step 4 – Offer

At the end of the bid period, all bids for each property are put in priority order.

Bidders are prioritised according to their band and points total. If two people in the same band have the same number of points, the person who has been registered the longest is put first.

Housing Needs carries out all the necessary eligibility checks and a shortlist of eligible applicants for each property is then produced.

The top three bidders from each shortlist will be invited to view the property, usually during the week following the close of bids. Following this, it will be offered to the person with the highest points.

If the person who was top of the shortlist refuses the property, it is then offered to the next person on the list, and so on.

You do not get penalised for withdrawing your bid for a property at the viewing stage, but if you are offered the property and then refuse it, it will count as a refusal of a reasonable offer. If you refuse two reasonable offers, your application may be deferred for 12 months.

If you are offered a property you will not be considered for other homes until you have made a decision on the first offer. If you appear at the top of more than one shortlist at the same time you will need to decide which property you prefer.

Step 5 – Feedback

It is not possible to notify you individually when your bids have been unsuccessful but you can get this information from the website (see 'bidding history' after you have logged in), or contact the Customer Service Centre.

All properties that have been advertised will be listed on the Feedback page of the magazine once they have been let. This tells you how many people bid for each property as well as the band and points level of the successful bidder.

If you have any questions about how Home4U applies to you or about bidding for properties please contact the Customer Service centre in person or on 01438 242666



SCRUTINY (20.01.09)

The Points Scheme

Stevenage Homes' aim is to help those in greatest housing need so we have drawn up a Housing Needs Register that uses a priority-banding scheme to show our assessment of housing need. Within each band applicants are listed according to their housing points award, household makeup and property requirements.

Which band will I be in?

Depending on your personal circumstances, you will be registered in the main section (Band A) or the reserve section (Band B) of the Register. Those registered in Band B will be considered for a property only if there is no demand from applicants in Band A. If you would like the banding criteria please contact Stevenage Homes or visit www.stevenagehomes.org.uk

How many points will I have?

The points scheme is shown below:

Time points	Number of Points	Periodic/ Single Award
Time points	1	Per month
Insanitary accommodation		
No Inside toilet	10	One Award
No toilet	20	One Award
No bath or shower	10	One Award
No hot water supply	20	One Award
No cooking facilities	10	One Award
State of substantial disrepair	40	One Award
Sharing with relatives		
Single applicant	10	One Award
Couple	20	One Award
Family	30	One Award
Sharing with non-relatives		
Single/couple	20	One Award
Family	30	One Award
Sharing bedroom with non-relatives	40	One Award
Household living apart	50	One Award
Overcrowding		
First extra bedspace needed	20	One Award
Each further bedspace needed	40	One Award
Opposite sexes sharing a bedroom, age 10 or under	10	One Award
Opposite sexes sharing a bedroom, age 11 or over	40	One Award
Age gap of 10 years or more sharing	5	One Award
2 children sharing a single room	10	One Award
3 children sharing a single room	40	One Award
3 children sharing a double room	10	One Award
Per child aged 1+ for each year of age (to a maximum of 18)	1	One Award
Parent/guardian sharing room with child under 10	10	One Award
Parent/guardian sharing a room with child 11 or over of the same sex	20	One Award
Parent/guardian sharing a room with child 11 or over of the opposite sex	40	One Award

Time points	Number of Points	Periodic/ Single Award
Time points	1	Per month
Under-occupation		
Per excess bedroom in house or bungalow	30	One Award
Per excess bedroom in flat or maisonette	10	One Award
Medical priority (as assessed by the Medical Assessment Panel)		
Urgent priority	200	One Award
High priority	70	One Award
Medium priority	30	One Award
Low priority	15	One Award
Un-Adaptable Properties (adaptation assessed by an Occupational Therapist)	200	One Award
Lacking playspace of 20msq for a child aged 12 or under	20	One Award
Families in flats/maisonettes		
Without a lift on the first floor	10	One Award
Without a lift on the second floor	20	One Award
Without a lift on the third floor	40	One Award
With a lift on any floor	10	One Award
In a tower block (6 floors or more)	10	One Award
With a child under 18 living above shops	20	One Award
Older people in flats/maisonettes		
Without a lift on the first floor	10	One Award
Without a lift on the second floor	20	One Award
Without a lift on the third floor	30	One Award
Older people needing sheltered accommodation		
High priority	50	One Award
Medium priority	30	One Award
Low priority	15	One Award
Expecting a child	2	One Award
Single applicants with access to children	30	One Award
Applicants in a council or RSL bedsit for 4 years	50	One Award
Applicants in tied accommodation	5	One Award
Applicants in an assured shorthold tenancy	5	One Award
Applicants with Special Needs (subject to a Senior Officer Housing Needs Panel)	up to 250	One Award
Applicants in council-provided temporary accommodation (all other points removed)	7	Per Month
Applicants with No Fixed Address	40	One Award
Applicants subject to a Senior Officer Housing Needs Panel for Exceptional Circumstances	up to 250	One Award

Where to get Your Home4U APPENDIX 3

Name	Type	Address	Opening Times
Bedwell			
Bedwell Community Centre	Community Centre	Bedwell Crescent	Mon-Fri 08.30-13.30, Sat 09.00-12.00
Broadwater			
Hertford Road Community Centre	Community Centre	Hertford Road, Kenilworth Close	Mon-Fri 10.00-14.30
Marymead Coffee Bar	Community Centre	Willows Link	Mon-Fri 08.30-14.00, Sat-Sun 10.00-12.00
St Peter's Community Hall	Community Centre	The Willows	Mon-Fri 09.30-13.30, Sat-Sun 10.00-12.00
Chells			
Chells Manor Community Centre	Community Centre	12 Emperors Gate, Fairlands Way	Mon-Fri 9.30-15.00
Timebridge Community Centre	Community Centre	Mobbsbury Way	Mon-Fri 9.00-16.00, Sat-Sun - members only
Great Ashby			
Great Ashby Community Centre	Community Centre	Whitehorse Lane	Mon-Fri 08.30-12.00 and 13.30-16.00
Old Town			
Springfield House	Community Centre	24 High Street	Mon-Fri 09.00-14.00
Stevenage Old Town Library	Library	38 High Street	Mon 14.00-17.00, Tue 09.30-13.00, Wed - closed, Thur 14.00-17.00, Fri 09.30-17.00, Sat 09.30-13.00
Pin Green			
Douglas Drive Day Centre	Community Centre	32 Douglas Drive	Mon & Tue 9.00-15.00, Wed 09.00-16.00, Thur 10.30-16.00, Fri 09.00-13.00
Pin Green Community Centre	Community Centre	291 Archer Road	Mon-Fri 09.30-14.00
The Oval Community Centre	Community Centre	Vardon Road	Mon-Thur 09.00-15.30, Fri 09.00-12.30, Sat-Sun, 09.30-12.00
Shephall			
Broad Hall Community Centre	Community Centre	Shephall Green	Mon-Fri 09.00-13.00, Sat-Sun 12.00-23.00
Poplars & Bandle Hill Community Centre	Community Centre	Magpie Crescent	Mon-Fri 09.30-15.30
The Hyde Out Community Resource Centre	Community Centre	2-6 The Hyde	Various Activities: Mon 09.00-21.30, Tue 09.00-15.30, Wed 09.30-21.30, Thur 09.00-12.30, Fri 09.30-16.00
Women's Resource Centre	Support	37-39 The Hyde	Mon-Fri 09.30-16.00
St. Nicholas			
St Nicholas Community Centre	Community Centre	59 Canterbury Way	Mon-Fri 9.30-14.00
Symonds Green			
Symonds Green Community Centre	Community Centre	Filey Close	Mon-Fri 9.30-14.00
Town Centre			
Stevenage Central Library	Library	Southgate	Mon-Wed 09.00-20.00, Thur 10.30-20.00, Fri 09.00-17.00, Sat 09.00-16.00
Citizen's Advice Bureau	Support	Swingate House, Danestrete	Mon-Wed 09.30-12.00, Thur - appts only, Fri 09.30-12.00
Customer Service Centre	Support	Daneshill House, Danestrete	Mon-Fri 08.30-17.30
Daneshill House Reception	Support	Daneshill House, Danestrete	

The Adverts

studio flat

RefNo. 142

Location Stevenage
Borough Stevenage Borough Council
Landlord Stevenage Borough Council
Rent £67.87pw
Features Electric central heating and entry phone but no lift. Easy access to shops and transport. Close to amenities.

APPENDIX 3

Key to advert symbols

Sheltered properties have a white background

Minimum and maximum number of people who can live in this property

Floor level of property, if flat or maisonette

Wheelchair symbol - Suitable for wheelchair users for full time indoor and outdoor mobility

Number of bedrooms in the property

Feedback

Understanding the Feedback Reports

In each edition of Home4U there will be a Feedback page. The feedback contains lettings that have taken place since the previous edition.

Magazine Issue Date
This is the publication date of the freesheet that the advert appeared in.

Advert Reference Number
Combined with the freesheet issue date, this gives a unique identity to any advert appearing in the freesheet.

Property Size and Type
This is simply a description of the property advertised.

Location
This gives an indication of where the property is situated within Stevenage.

Bids
This is the total number of expressions of interest that were made against the adverts by members.

Letting Information
This is the status of the successful member who bid for the property.

Example of Feedback Report

Magazine Issue Date	Advert Reference	Size	Property Type	Location	Letting Information		
					Bands	Points	Registration Date
5-May-06	001	1 bed	Flat	Stevenage	A	100	2-Jun-06
5-May-06	002	1 bed	Flat	Stevenage	A	250	2-Jun-06
5-May-06	003	1 bed	Flat	Stevenage	A	270	2-Jun-06
6-May-06	004	2 bed	Flat	Stevenage	B	190	3-Jun-06
7-May-06	005	3 bed	Flat	Stevenage	B	110	4-Jun-06
8-May-06	006	4 bed	Flat	Stevenage	B	200	5-Jun-06

SCRUTINY (20.01.09)

Bidding

Making your bids on the internet

The quickest and easiest way to bid is through our website www.home4u.org.uk. Instructions are given on screen but you will need to know your unique Home4U number and date of birth in order to log on.

On the website there is an online copy of the Home4U magazine and as soon as you choose a property you can place a bid. If you have made a bid but then change your mind you can remove the bid (as long as the bidding cycle is still open). You can also view your bidding history once you have logged in.

Free internet access is available at both libraries in Stevenage and you can also bid online at the Customer Service Centre.

Making your bids by Telephone

1 To begin making your bids dial:	09062 942 030
2 You will hear:	"Welcome to the Stevenage Home4U Property Line, Please enter the number section of your Reference number."
3 You should now enter the numerical part of your Reference number only. EG. If your Reference number is SBC54321 you only need to type in '54321'. Once you have entered the correct number you will hear:	"Thank you. Please enter the day number of your birth date e.g. For 16/04/1960 enter 16 or for 08/01/58 enter 08 (you must put a 0 before a single number)
4 You should now enter the day number of your date of birth. Once you have entered the correct number you will hear:	"Thank you. Please enter your first property reference bid number."
5 Once you have entered the property reference number correctly you will hear:	"Thank you if you would like to add an additional bid press one or press two to complete your bids."
6 If you have pressed one you will hear:	"Please enter your second property bid number or press the star key to complete your bidding."
7 Once you have entered the property reference number correctly you will hear:	"Thank you if you would like to add an additional bid press one or press two to complete your bids."
8 When you have finished bidding you will hear:	"Thank you for bidding on the Stevenage Home4U Property line."
If you have made errors you will hear some instructions as follows:	
9 If you have made an error with your number you will hear:	"I am sorry, the registration number you have entered is not recognised. Please try again."
In this case re-enter your number dialing carefully making sure the number is correct	
10 If you make further errors you will hear:	"I am sorry, the registration number you have entered is not found. Please check with your registering partner and call again."

Bidding (continued)

Making your bids by Text Message

Action

Example

1 To begin making your bids:	Open a new text message
2 Enter your registration number via keys	SBC12345
3 Then followed Immediately by a hash mark:	SBC12345#
4 You should now enter the advert reference number of your 1st bid followed immediately by a hash mark:	SBC12345#456#
If you have finished Bidding then send. If not keep following the instructions below.	
5 You should now enter the advert reference number of your 2nd bid followed immediately by a hash mark:	SBC12345#456#491#
If you have finished Bidding then send. If not keep following the instructions below.	
6 You should now enter the advert reference number of your 3rd bid followed immediately by a hash mark:	SBC12345#456#491#444#
7 When you have entered all of your bids send your Text message bid:	Send
8 The number	07781 472726

- Most mobile phone companies charge SMS text messages at around 10p per text
- To add numbers to the message keep pressing the keys until you get to the digit and select.
- On most mobile phones to find the hash character first press the star key then select the hash mark.
- You can enter your bids in both upper and lower case
- Check your registration number and bids are correct before sending

How to complete your Bidding Coupon

Home4U Bid Coupon

Tick this box if you need more coupons sent to you



	Bid 1	Bid 2	Bid 3
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
0	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Your coupon has your name and your registration number printed on it - please check that these details are correct.
- You can bid for up to three properties for each edition of the magazine.
- Each property will have a 3 digit reference number, shown in the property advert in the Stevenage Home4U.
- For example if you want to apply for the properties which have the reference number 456, 491, and 444, you should mark the coupon as shown in the example copy. You should put an X in the first column against the relevant first digit of the reference number.
- You should put an X in the second column against the relevant second digit of the reference number.
- You should put an X in the third column against the relevant third digit of the reference number.
- Enter the date shown on the front of the Stevenage Home4U, from which you are bidding for properties.
- Please return your coupon by post to Stevenage Home4U . The address is already on the coupon, but you will need to put a stamp on it.

Which Properties can I bid for? APPENDIX 3

What Type and Size of Property can I bid for?

In the Home4U system you can only bid for properties of a type and size that is suitable for your needs. You should have been informed of which properties these are when your housing application was accepted. The Stevenage Homes property eligibility criteria are set out below:

FOR GENERAL NEEDS PROPERTIES	
Property Type	Family Composition
For general needs properties	
Studio flat	Single person
1-Bedroom flat	Single person
	Single person with access to children
	Couples with no children
	Couples with access to children
2-Bedroom flat	Family with one child - Related non-married couples (e.g. siblings)
2-Bedroom maisonette or house	Family with one child
3-Bedroom flat, maisonette or house	Family with two or three children
3- or 4-Bedroom house	Family with four children
4- or 5-Bedroom house	Family with five or more children
For people over 60 or with support needs	
Studio flat, 1-bedroom flat or 1-bedroom bungalow	Single person aged 60+ or in need of specialised disabled accommodation
1-Bedroom two person flat or bungalow	Couple where one is aged 60+ or in need of specialist disabled accommodation
2-Bedroom flat or bungalow	Couple with medical priority for separate bedrooms or family in need of specialist disabled accommodation

There are exceptions to these criteria for example based on medical need. If you need further information please contact Stevenage Homes.

What if I am in rent arrears?

If you have housing related debts with Stevenage Homes or another landlord you will usually not be eligible to move to another property. Please contact Stevenage Homes if you need more information.



General information

Bid deadline

All bids for properties must reach the Home4U office by 2pm on the closing date shown on the front of each edition of the Home4U magazine. Bids received after this time will not be considered eligible.

Need help bidding?

You can contact the helpline on **01438 242666**, or contact your landlord who will be able to help and advise you on how to make your bids and talk you through the bidding process.

www.home4U.org.uk

You can make your bids on the website at the above address. Please ensure you enter your Home4U number and bids correctly.

Subscriptions

For a small subscription fee of £8.70, Home4U magazine can be posted directly to you for six months. Please make your cheques/postal orders payable to 'Locata (Housing Services) Ltd' and send, together with your identification number and mailing address to:

Home4U
PO Box 377
Ruislip
HA4 4DL

Please notify Home4U of any change to your mailing address.

Bidding telephone number

☎ 09062 942 030

To make your bids by telephone use the above number and follow the instructions given over the line or as shown in this Scheme User Guide (this is a premium rate number charged at 25p per minute).

Ordering more coupons

If you are running low on coupons, there are two ways for you to order more:

- tick the box on the back of the bidding coupon when you next bid
- log in to the Home4U website and order more coupons online

Bidding by text message

☎ 07781 472 726

To make your bids by text (SMS), follow the instructions shown in the Scheme User Guide. The bidding deadline will always be 2pm on a Wednesday.

Partners

Housing Needs

Stevenage Homes Ltd
Daneshill House, Danestrete,
Stevenage, Herts, SG1 1HN
tel: 01438 242666
textphone: 01438 242150
fax: 01438 242384
email: Housing@StevenageHomes.org.uk

SCRUTINY (20.01.09)

Stevenage Borough Council

Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage, Herts, SG1 1HN
tel: 01438 242242
textphone: 01438 242555
fax: 01438 242566
email: csc@stevenage.gov.uk

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

14

TITLE OF REPORT: SCRUTINY – THE FUTURE

The Chairman to report on discussions with the PARC Chairman regarding the scope and future role of the Scrutiny Committee.

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