

HOME-LINK



The Cambridge Sub-regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme

An update for agencies

October 2007

Introduction

Choice based lettings (CBL) is a new way of letting council and housing association homes. The local authorities in the Cambridge Sub-region are introducing a CBL scheme from February 2008, which will be known as Home-Link. A range of consultation events were held with voluntary, statutory and support agencies in the spring of 2007. This newsletter is to update agencies on the progress made since then and to raise awareness of the changes which will affect customers from February 2008. Fenland DC will be joining the scheme in November 2008.

A date for your diaries

Training sessions for voluntary, statutory and support agencies will be held on 21st

January 2008 at the Meadows Centre, Cambridge and on the 22nd January 2008 at Forest Heath DC, Mildenhall.

We will be sending out more details about the events shortly.

If you would like to attend one of the sessions, please contact Jon Longden at jonathan.longden@cambridge.gov.uk

What is the Home-Link scheme?

Most available council and housing association homes in the Cambridge sub-region will be advertised every fortnight via the internet, in a property magazine, at council and housing association offices and at other access points. Customers who have applied to be housed will be able to express interest in the homes they are interested in.

Homes will usually be let to the person in the highest assessed need who meets the criteria for the property. Following a three month consultation process, each partner is introducing its own lettings policy, based on common principles. Each local authority has had their policy approved by local elected members. The lettings policy outlines how housing need is assessed and how homes will be let. Customers will be placed into one of four broad housing needs bands. The same needs assessment and banding structure will apply across the sub-region.

Customers who are already registered for housing with one of the partners will be notified of their new housing needs band before the scheme starts in February 2008.

To encourage movement across the sub-region, a proportion of homes will be

advertised as available to customers with a confirmed local connection to any of the seven local authorities in the sub-region. The remaining homes will be available to customers with a confirmed local connection to that authority area.

For more information about how the scheme will operate, contact details are at the end of this newsletter.



Locata on board

Following a procurement exercise, in August 2007, Locata Housing Services were confirmed as the chosen IT provider for the scheme.

Locata provide CBL services to a range of other Local Authorities. To see their scheme in action, try one of the following websites:

<http://www.locata.org/>
<http://www.homemove.org.uk/>
<http://www.harlowhomefinder.co.uk/>

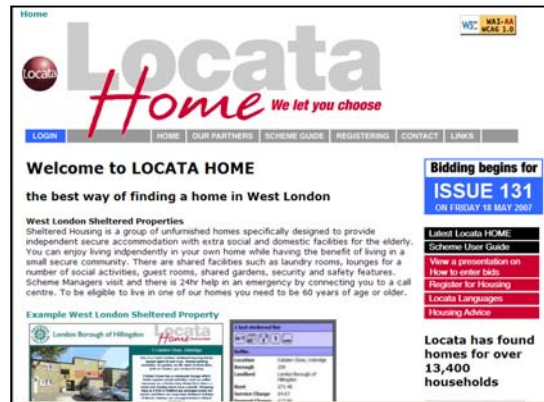
To see a demonstration of how to use the Locata system, try the following website:

<http://www.locata.org/uploads/NewPublicPresentation.htm>

We are developing a website which will enable customers to:

- apply for housing;
- find out about available homes they are eligible for;
- obtain feedback on homes they expressed an interest in; and;
- look at other housing options.

Agencies will be able to assist their customers to express interest in available homes, or potentially express interest on their customers' behalf by accessing the website. This will also give agencies the opportunity to ensure we hold all relevant details about their customer and update us with any change in their circumstances.



Scheme branding

Successful CBL schemes have an individual identity through positive branding and a distinct name. Following a consultation process, our scheme is to be called Home-Link. We will be using the map of the sub-region as the logo for the scheme and we are working on the design of the property flyer and scheme guide during the Autumn of 2007.

Experience from other schemes

CBL schemes are now in place in over a third of local authorities across the country, with a further 50% planning to implement CBL in the next few years.

Studies of existing schemes have found that vulnerable people usually have a similar or improved likelihood of being housed through CBL, often in better areas than under the previous allocations schemes. Many people

who were initially considered to be vulnerable did not need assistance to express interest in available homes. Customer satisfaction and understanding of the lettings system increased significantly with the introduction of CBL.

Successful schemes ensure that support is in place for customers who need it. It is important that agencies who provide support are able to help their customers.

For more information on the impact of CBL on potentially vulnerable groups in other schemes, please contact:
jonathan.longden@cambridge.gov.uk.

How will vulnerable people be helped?

A range of measures are being proposed to ensure that all customers can access available housing including:

- Properties will be advertised in a number of ways.
- Voluntary agencies will be able to access information via the internet.
- The banding structure is designed to prioritise those in the highest need.
- Customers will be able to express interest in homes in various ways including via a postal coupon, through the web, in person at an office and through a text message.
- A copy of the property magazine can be posted to housebound customers.
- Information will be translated into community languages.
- We will send all customers a welcome pack when the scheme goes live, explaining their new banding and how the scheme will work.

- The scheme guide will be available in a range of formats.
- We intend to allow agencies and families to express interest on behalf of a customer (as a proxy bidder).
- Downloadable audio scheme guides will be available from the website.
- Properties will be clearly labelled to show who can express interest in the homes.
- We will monitor the system to ensure people in high housing need are expressing interest in available homes and are being housed.
- Where a property is adapted, it will be labelled clearly to show the type of adaptation and who the property is suitable for.

Have you any other suggestions as to how we can make the scheme more accessible for vulnerable people?

How can you get involved?

There are a variety of ways in which you can be involved in the Home-Link scheme.

- If you would like a member of our implementation team to come and talk with you about the scheme, please contact us.
- Make sure your staff and customers are aware of the changes coming and how they should participate in Home-Link.
- Training sessions for agencies will be held in January 2008. We would like members of your organisation to come along to one of these events.
- In consultation with agencies, we have developed an access strategy

that outlines the responsibilities of local authorities and housing associations to vulnerable people. We would like support agencies to sign up to the strategy to confirm their role in supporting their customers. For a copy of the consultation draft of the strategy, please visit the Local Authority websites. Any comments on the access strategy are gratefully received.

- When Home-Link starts, agencies will be able to explain how it works to customers, and provide support where necessary.

If you have any suggestions on the access strategy, about how we can involve organisations such as yourselves, or develop Home-Link further to meet your customers' needs, please let us know.



Contact us

For more information please contact:

Cambridge City Council:

E Mail: cbl@cambridge.gov.uk

Tel: 01223 457 977

East Cambs DC/ Hereward HA:

E Mail: enquiries@herewardhousing.org.uk

Tel: 0845 850 5757

Fenland DC:

E mail: info@fenland.gov.uk

Tel: 01354 654321

Forest Heath DC

E mail: cbl@forest-heath.gov.uk

Tel: 01638719350

Huntingdonshire DC

E mail: HousingReception@huntsdc.gov.uk

Tel: 01480 388220

South Cambridgeshire DC

E mail: cbl@southcambs.gov.uk

Tel: 0845 045 0500

St Edmundsbury BC

E Mail: cbl@stedsbc.gov.uk

Tel: 01284 757178