

## **Appendix 2 - SUMMARY OF BUILDING BLOCKS EXERCISE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The choice based lettings team carried out a variety of research during March and April of this year, in order to canvas opinion from potential users, and among staff groups and partner agencies and to learn from the experience of other authorities who are already running choice based lettings schemes. Survey and questionnaire research is written up elsewhere. This report is a summary of the consultation and research undertaken on the “building blocks” exercise to inform the shape of the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Public Meeting**

The public were given 5 categories to vote in. (Where to advertise; how to bid; length of cycle; number of bids; priority – points vs bands). The number of voters was between 14 and 15. People may have been influenced by other group members and by the answers to questions by staff. Participants were asked to vote for each heading either by picking their choice, or top 2 or 3, or “yes” or “no” to each option. Although the numbers that attended the event were limited, they appeared fairly representative of customers, although none were under 25 years of age.

#### **RSLs meeting**

This was attended by all the major RSLs, to focus on the common housing register. At the meeting, participants were asked to discuss all of the issues contained in the CBL Building Blocks Exercise. Some of the representatives were already familiar with CBL schemes that operate in other areas where they have housing stock. They were invited to vote on all the options. This was either by picking their choice, or top 2 or 3, or “yes” or “no” to each option. Nine 9 people were eligible to vote. In some cases less than 9 people voted, in some cases people voted more than once. Therefore figures have been given for how many the votes were cast. This should be seen as an indicative vote only.

#### **Partner Agencies/Voluntary/Statutory Groups**

These are the people who work with our more vulnerable applicants and tenants. Due to the diversity of this group, we have had broad discussions with them, coming to consensus or majority view, rather than voting. We are part way through these discussions.

#### **Focus Groups**

Two scheduled meetings have taken place. Seven people were present at the first and four at the second. They were selected for demographic diversity. They only discussed 5 categories (the same as the public meeting). Facilitators report the “mood” of the meeting rather than consensus or vote.

#### **Internal staff group**

A meeting was offered to an internal staff group, but no staff members were available to attend.

#### **Project Groups**

#### **Accessibility Group**

The group approached the building blocks as a discussion tool and did not vote on the options or try to form a consensus, although consensus did form on some of the options.

### **Allocations Group**

This group is still working on the particular building blocks relevant to their remit (Points vs. bands, Priority mechanisms - inc priority cards, budding rules, direct offers, number of bids, refusals and combined.) These will be written up separately.

### **Consultation Group.**

This group had a 2 hour opportunity to go through the building blocks. The group agreed to go for the discussion-consensus method rather than voting on each item.

### **Housing Needs Staff “Away Day”**

Housing Needs staff (options, allocations and temporary accommodation management teams, plus furnished tenancies) had an “away day” at the end of April. We undertook the exercise with them in groups. The groups had half an hour to discuss and make their decisions. There were four groups, plus one group made up of “experts” – staff who had already had a lot of involvement with CBL. The other groups were mixed to ensure inclusion of staff from all areas of work.

The time on this exercise was limited and some decisions were made hurriedly. Some groups prioritised getting through the exercise as quickly as possible whilst others prioritised discussing each item. Because of the limited time, groups were given some blocks before others and so some headings have more answers than others.

Due to the nature of this exercise, it should be regarded as a useful “snapshot” of staff views, rather than a detailed consideration.

### **Oxford City Homes**

Tenancy & void services were asked for their opinions. In the case of tenancy services this was done on the basis of voting with stickers. The results are patchy in that not everyone voted on all topics. Voids commented on just the issues that were considered to impact on void turnaround times.

### **Other Authorities**

Members of the team carried out visits to other authorities that have already adopted CBL schemes and researched schemes on the internet and by conducting telephone interviews with officers. The authorities were selected for a variety of reasons: either they are of a similar size to Oxford City Council or serve an area with a similar demographic or they were selected because they have similar pressure on their housing stock. The team also investigated the ODPM pilot authorities. The final category was authorities who are examples of good practice.

More detailed research work needs to be undertaken on specific aspects of the scheme, with regard to what’s done in other authorities.

## **RESULTS**

### **1 Advertising Method**

Colour magazine / Newssheet / Mail outs / Free newspaper Ad / Web / Property Shop  
*(Voting groups asked to pick top 3)*

### **Public Meeting**

The **news sheet** was the most favoured of the paper based options (11 votes), with the others receiving equal votes (6 or 7). The **Web** was as popular as most of the paper methods (8). A property shop scored poorly (2).

## RSLs

It was felt that some vulnerable applicants could be excluded from **web** advertising by lack of access to or expertise with technology, and that support would not always be available when needed. A **property shop** was considered to be an expensive option and could be inaccessible for some applicants. Voting was low in this category with the top options (web and mail outs) scoring only 3 each.

## Partner Agencies

The **Property shop** was a firm favourite but the idea of sharing with an estate agent was not liked as it had many negative connotations. A **News Sheet** was attractive as it could be accessed in many places. **Web** was considered useful. Mail outs not useful as vulnerable clients wouldn't look at it anyway. Newspaper ad wouldn't reach enough people and not worth the money.

## Focus Groups

Colour Magazine an expensive waste. Newspaper ads wouldn't get enough coverage. **Web** OK as long as enough access points. **Property shops** and **Mail outs** preferred. As many options as affordable would reach the widest number of people.

## Accessibility Project Group

**Web** advertising is favoured, as the group felt many people could access it through connections in public libraries, community centres, Internet cafes, support agencies as well as in their own homes. It should be accompanied by one method of **paper** advertising. It is considered important that whatever form of paper advertising is chosen, it can easily be emailed and printed off by other agencies in black and white format. The group thought a **property shop** was not required and it would be better to have well trained staff in a variety of locations, as access would be better than if resources were concentrated in a central location.

## Consultation Project Group

**Web** as properties already on the system and allows all hours access. **Property shop** was favoured, but combined with other activities, such as customer services, housing advice, HB & CT. Liked the face-to-face aspects of it and ability to assist users. Central space should be supplemented by satellite points round the city to improve access. Concern about using estate agents for a property shop because of different ethos to social housing. **Newspapers** were favoured: either free or Oxford Mail/Times. Thought that this would be better than a **newsheet** for people who didn't go near council offices/libraries etc. Also considered that the free property paper could be used.

*Group wanted text on adverts to be limited and symbols used. Suggested that key could possibly be translated into major languages.*

## Housing Needs Team

Two groups didn't answer this question. Of the three that did, the **web** and **property shop** were preferred by all. The groups were divided on the best paper-based system with 1 vote each for: **colour magazine, free newspaper and newsheet** (expert group choice).

## Oxford City Homes

**Web** and **Property shop** (8 & 6 votes) were favoured with **mail outs** and **free newspaper** getting a significant 5 votes each

## Other Authorities

All use **web** advertising. All the other methods are used with apparent success in different areas, with no authorities reporting that applicants had difficulty accessing the adverts; indeed in many cases demand had increased when properties were advertised.

## Summary

The **property shop** was a popular option, as it's considered accessible and staff could provide support for bidders. It was considered that this could be combined with other housing advice services (eg options; home choice; housing, debt and benefit advice; housing benefit and council tax) with funding coming from more than one source. It was also considered that there should be trained staff in a variety of locations as well as in one central location. All those consulted could see the need for **web advertising**, though some felt support was needed for vulnerable applicants to access the advertising successfully. Support for the **paper-based options** was divided, but a newspaper advert was the least popular choice.

## 2 Bid Cycle

Weekly / Fortnightly / Monthly

*(Voting groups asked to chose 1)*

## Public Meeting

**Monthly** received 8 votes and **two weekly** 6. People didn't like weekly as they felt it was not long enough to make a decision and people might miss out

## RSLs

There was strong feeling that a **weekly** cycle was too short for some vulnerable applicants to make a decision. RSL representatives felt they needed longer than a weekly bid cycle to carry out their own procedures. 4 out of 4 voters picked the **two-week** option, although 1 later wrote and expressed strong preference for a **weekly** cycle.

## Partner Agencies

General consensus was for a **two-week bid cycle**. Group felt that one bid cycle should close before the next one opens to avoid complications. A longer cycle would reduce advertising costs.

## Focus Groups

The first group felt the same as the public meeting – preferred a **monthly cycle**. Some members felt that a quarterly cycle was preferable, as it would mean that more properties could be advertised and applicants would have longer to do research and make decisions. The second group felt these objectives could be met in a **two-week cycle** and that a monthly cycle is too long.

## Accessibility Project Group

The consensus was that a **two-week** bid cycle was the best option; with the reservation that this could affect applicants whose support packages only allowed for a monthly visit.

## Consultation Project Group

The **one-week bid cycle** favoured, based on the Herefordshire model (adverts open for 7 days and overlapping with the following cycle). This model was thought to reduce voids and get people housed most quickly. Currently people only have a few hours notice of an offer, so this would increase the deliberation time open to them.

## Housing Needs Team

4 of the groups opted for the **two-week bid cycle**, with the expert group going for the **one-week cycle**

## Oxford City Homes

Monthly and **two-weekly** cycles were favoured with 8 & 6 votes each by tenancy services. From a **voids** point of view, a **one-week cycle** was very strongly supported.

## Other Authorities

A **weekly bid cycle** has been strongly argued for, for example by homepoint, Hereford and home connections, Camden. Some authorities manage the tight time schedule by having preset viewing days and times, for example, Camden's bid cycle opens on Thursday at midnight and continues till midnight on Monday. Short-listing is done on a Tuesday and Wednesday, with viewings taking place on Thursday and Friday. This can only be achieved with co-operation from partners, especially when working with several partners. Those such as Brighton and the Vale of the White Horse, who have chosen a **two-week cycle**, seem committed to it, though the East London Letting Company has just changed from a fortnightly to a **weekly cycle**.

***This category needs to be considered in conjunction with bid limits***

## Summary

A **two-week cycle** was the most popular, although a **one-week cycle** was strongly argued for by a number of people, including those working in voids. The one-week cycle was more popular if it was run on the Hereford model with bidding being open for a week and the next cycle overlapping the last. Vale of White Horse was concerned that they would not have enough properties to advertise in a weekly cycle. Consultees whose perspective was to consider the needs of vulnerable people tended to choose a longer cycle. A shorter bid cycle was favoured when looking at reducing void times.

## **3 Bid Method**

Telephone Line (automated) / Web / Paper Coupons / Text Bids  
(Voting groups asked to chose top 2)

## **Public Meeting**

**Telephone line, Paper coupons & Web.** These got 10, 9 and 9 votes each. Text bids received just 1 (from the youngest person present)

## **RSLs**

RSL representatives felt vulnerable applicants would get more support using the **telephone** or the **web**. Telephone line / Web were favoured. These got 3 votes each. Text and paper coupons were not voted for.

## **Partner Agencies**

Agencies liked a diversity of options. **Telephone** useful – automated service good for out of hours, but with option of speaking to “real” person in office hours. Minicom option needed for deaf people. **Text** very useful for under 20s and asylum seekers. Web generally useful but good access needed. Paper coupons eschewed as being fiddly, prone to human error and likely that clients would lose them

## **Focus Groups**

As above, **phone** useful for all hours but option of speaking to a real person. **Web** useful but access points required. Some members felt strongly that lack of access to technology was

not an issue as web access is available in public libraries. Paper coupons too easy to lose and prone to human error, and there is great mistrust of the postal service. **Text** not liked by some in these groups, (no asylum seekers or under 20s present) some of the younger members felt texting would be accessible and affordable.

### **Accessibility Project Group**

Very little support for **paper** bidding, as it would be administratively difficult, though the group felt that some applicants would be reassured by it. **Texting** got strong support as it would be used by young applicants and support workers could assist a bid from any location, including the client's home. An automated **telephone line** was considered a good option for giving 24 hour access.

### **Consultation Project Group**

**Web** important as system is web based and is available 24/7. **Phone** also useful, providing out of hours service and relatively simple to use, but should be backed up with an operator service. **Text** thought to be useful for certain groups, relatively inexpensive. Paper coupons NOT thought to be a good idea – giving too much room for user error, staff error and postal problems

### **Housing Needs Team**

Two groups did not vote in this category. Two groups favoured **all four methods**. The expert group voted for **text, automated phone and web bidding**.

### **Oxford City Homes**

**Telephone line** and **web** were most popular receiving 8 votes each. Paper coupons received 5 votes and text bidding 2.

### **Other Authorities**

An **automated telephone line** is strongly recommended by almost everyone, as it not only frees up staff for outreach work and assisted bidding, but provides a 24 hours service. However, Derby say that their automated telephone system is underused compared to the **web** kiosk. All authorities offer some variety of methods.

### **Summary**

Everyone supported **web** bidding. Those who liked **texting** gave it strong support as a cheap, accessible method, especially suitable for some vulnerable groups, where it is easy to support bidders. There is support for an **automated telephone line** as a 24-hour option, although people would like the opportunity to talk to a human. Telephone bidding must be accessible to Minicom users. . Paper bidding is the least popular option, as it is seen to be prone to error, and the least likely method to be supported when vulnerable applicants are bidding. (This is especially unpopular if there is a telephoning a human option).

### **4 Bid Limits - Number of Bids**

One / Limited (probably 3) / Unlimited  
(Voting Groups asked to chose 1)

### **Public Meeting**

Preferred the **Limited option** (9 of 14 votes) Felt that unlimited would give to much scope for confusion and refusals, disadvantaging those who were not in highest priority

### **RSLs**

Felt one bid was too restrictive. Unlimited bids would lead to too much speculative bidding.  
**Preferred Limited**. 2 votes for limited, 1 for unlimited 0 for one bid

## Partner Agencies

Preferred **Limited** - unlimited too chaotic with high refusals. Limited would encourage intelligent bidding and compromises, but should be **limited to 2 bids**

## Focus Group

The first group preferred the **Unlimited option**. The Group wanted penalties for refusals to discourage frivolous or speculative bids. The second group favoured **limited bids** to prevent speculative bids and to avoid clogging up the administrative process.

## Accessibility Project Group

There was a general consensus on a **limit of 3 bids**. The group suggested that for hard to let properties or sheltered accommodation, a “bonus” bid could be introduced which could be used in addition to the usual 3.

## Consultation Project Group

**Limited bids – 3 per cycle** (based on 1 week bid cycle). Group wondered if bids could be prioritised by users (in a similar way to UCAS forms used to be prioritised)

## Housing Needs Team

All five groups wanted **limited bidding** (no consensus on what the limit should be).

## Oxford City Homes

**Unlimited bids** received 5 votes, limited 3 and one bid 1 vote.

## Other Authorities

A range of options, depending on the length of the bid cycle, generally a shorter bid cycle = fewer bids. ELLC allow two bids, Southampton City Council and Locata up to 3, Vale of Glamorgan allows unlimited bids (but this is in an area of low demand with hard to let properties).

***This category should be considered in conjunction with length of bid cycle***

## Summary

There is very strong support for **limited bidding**, though no clear consensus on what the limit should be: generally the idea of 2 or 3 bids was supported. This should depend largely on the length of the cycle. A weekly cycle would lend itself more to 1 or 2 bids, with a two-weekly cycle being more appropriate for 3 bids.

## **5 Priority System**

Bands / Simplified Points / Points

*(Voting groups asked to chose 1)*

The outcome of this topic has been influenced by the recent legal cases which successfully challenged the robustness of banding schemes

## Public Meeting

14 out of 15 voted for **simplified points**. The public liked the idea of meeting complex needs; they were also notified of the legal issues.

## RSLs

3 out of 4 voted for **bands**. Some organisations are using CBL schemes in other areas where banding is already in place (eg Locata) and felt that the simplicity of banding was effective. This may have influenced the group feeling. (The other 1 voted for simplified points)

## **Partner Agencies**

**Simplified Points** were preferred. Agencies felt that the current scheme is too complex. Bands would be useful for clients but don't meet complex needs

## **Focus Group**

**Simplified points** were preferred with a weighting for waiting time in both groups. People were familiar with a points scheme, though they could see the benefit of simplifying it. There was a strong feeling that the system should be transparent. Bands were thought to be not fair, as they didn't allow for complex needs.

## **Accessibility Project Group**

There was consensus that the current scheme needs to be altered. The group liked **bands** as they felt the simplicity improved accessibility to the scheme, but felt that **points** were better able to meet complex needs.

## **Consultation Project Group**

**Simplified points** was favoured overall. Ideally bands were preferred, but group worried about the legal situation. A "brick" system was suggested where users would build up bricks into either a pyramid or tower, depending on their circumstances (with waiting time as the decider between numbers of bricks). This was thought to be attractive in its simplicity to understand by the public, but also able to meet complex need.

## **Housing Needs Team**

Only 3 groups voted in this category. Two groups (including the experts) wanted **bands**, and one wanted simplified points.

## **Oxford City Homes**

**Bands** were favoured with 8 votes. Points received 0 votes and simplified points just 2 votes.

## **Other Authorities**

Most have opted for **bands** despite recent legal challenges. Authorities we spoke to loved their bands systems and were prepared to ride out potential challenges. They are simple to administer and easy to understand. They have also reduced "**currency chasing**". Some London authorities have tinkered with their banding to improve the legal robustness or have opted for hybrid systems – see examples of other schemes. More recently, some authorities have introduced CBL using a simplified points scheme.

## **Summary**

There was no consensus on whether to choose points or bands, though no group thought the current scheme should be retained. The housing professionals tended to prefer **bands**, despite the possibility of legal challenge. The public and support agencies were more in favour of **simplified points**, perhaps because they are familiar with them, or because, like Shelter they felt that the means of determining priority need should be sensitive and sophisticated.

***The public meeting and focus groups did not consider the issues below***

### **6 Bidding rules**

Priority cards/ minimum points requirement/ advert labels/ proxy bidding

*All groups asked to say "yes" or "no" to each item*



## RSLs

Representatives felt **priority cards** should be used in a limited way, to prevent applicants from seeing homelessness as the quickest route to a desirable property. Only two votes were made, both in favour of priority cards.

- They felt that a **minimum points requirement** should not be needed, as feedback from previous cycles would enable bidders to draw sensible conclusions about what they could successfully bid for. Three out of four voters voted against a minimum points requirement being adopted.
- **Advert labels** are seen as a useful tool to prevent wasted bids, and essential for adapted properties, but should not be used as a means of meeting allocations targets. All four voters were in favour of advert labels.
- The group was in favour of **proxy bidding** in strictly limited circumstances. Proxy bidding should be restricted, and should not include housing officers or members of the allocations team. Family members should only be allowed to bid where there is a power of attorney. The three representatives who voted were all in favour of proxy bidding.

## Partner agencies

- **Priority Cards: No consensus** reached. Thought to be useful for those to whom we have a duty, but likely to encourage applicants down the homeless route and also to be unrealistic.
- **Minimum Points Required: No consensus** reached, but concern that it would increase currency chasing and limit the extent to which CBL could create sustainable communities.
- **Advert Labels:** Group generally favoured no advert labels, as there was concern that it may distort feedback and be an incentive to become homeless. However, some felt that it would be better to label properties so that clients (especially the vulnerable) didn't apply for properties they had no chance of getting. **No overall consensus.**
- **Proxy Bidding:** Most of group wanted no proxy bidding. Partner agencies would prefer to assist clients with bidding rather than be allowed to do it for them. This would be preferable from both an empowering and workload point of view. Some agencies with needy clients felt that proxy bidding would be essential. **Limited proxy bidding** seemed to be the consensus.

## Accessibility Project Group

- A consensus was reached that **priority cards** should be used, but only in conjunction with supported bidding. It was felt that it would be impossible to meet the duty to the statutorily homeless without using priority cards, but also that duty could be considered to be discharged where the priority card is not used. The group wanted priority to be given for a period long enough for vulnerable bidders to learn how to use the system, otherwise there would be a danger of applicants feeling forced to bid.
- The group felt that a **minimum points requirement** was not needed.
- **Advert labels** are not true to the principle of choice, and could lead to the least popular type of properties being offered to particular groups eg homeless applicants
- The group was concerned about **proxy bidding** being open to abuse, or at the least to complaints. The group could see times when it could be appropriate, but felt that it would be difficult to monitor strictly enough. It certainly should not be undertaken by allocations staff.

## Consultation Project Group

Only **Priority Cards** were considered by this group and they were thought to be a useful carrot to get homeless people to bid, especially if used in conjunction with Direct Offers.

## Housing Needs Team

- All five groups thought that priority cards should be used.
- Two groups favoured a minimum points requirement, although the expert team did not.
- Two groups, including the expert team, wanted advert labels to be used.
- Proxy bidding was favoured by two groups, including the expert team who wanted them to be used in a very limited set of circumstances in exceptional cases.

## Oxford City Homes

This group overwhelmingly rejected all 4 options.

## Other Authorities

There is a wide diversity of approaches to the issue of bidding rules. Some authorities see any such rules as restricting, and not true to the principles of choice, whereas others take a more pragmatic approach particularly where statutorily homeless applicants are in temporary accommodation. Southampton's scheme gives additional points (a de facto **priority card**) to homeless applicants who have been in temporary accommodation for more than six months. In Brighton and Hove's scheme, vulnerable applicants can appoint a **proxy bidder**, but staff will not share information with them unless a data protection form has been signed.

## Summary

- **Priority cards** are generally thought to be a **useful** tool when used for cases of statutory homelessness.
- A **minimum points requirement** was generally considered **unnecessary**.
- Some people felt **advert labels** were not true to the principles of choice, though most people consulted felt that disabled adapted properties should be labelled to prevent wasted bids. There is support for correctly labelling a property: eg by number of bedrooms, age restriction, disability adaptation etc. There is a lack of support for selecting certain properties for homeless people or other groups where it would restrict choice.
- **Proxy bidding** should be used but in **strictly limited** circumstances

## 7 Feedback method

Real time/ close of bidding

## RSLs

It was felt that real time bidding favours "intelligent bidders" and could be off-putting to others. Anyone dependant on a support worker may not be able to bid strategically as their support worker might not be available at the relevant time. On balance real time bidding could exclude a lot of the people whom the intention is to house. The voting showed three votes in favour of **giving results at the close of bidding** and a corresponding three votes against real time bids. One representative voted in favour of real time bidding.

## Partner agencies

Feedback should be given after the close of bidding. Real-time feedback would be confusing and misleading.

## Accessibility Project Group

There was a strong consensus that only **close of bidding** information should be given, as real time information would disadvantage vulnerable people.

## Consultation Project Group

Not discussed by this group

### **Housing Needs Team**

Not discussed by this group.

### **Oxford City Homes**

All votes (9) were for feedback only to be given at the **close of bidding**.

### **Other Authorities**

The Vale of White Horse DC operates a real time bidding system, where bidders can monitor their position on line. Camden's home choice scheme chose not to give real time bidding information as they felt it would be misleading and could deter potential bidders.

### **Summary**

There was a **strong consensus** that only **close of bidding information** should be given to prevent the exclusion of vulnerable people or those who had not learnt about the system.

## **8 Offers to multiple applicants**

Multiple offers for all vacancies/ for some vacancies/only one offer per vacancy

### **RSLs**

The group was in favour of making **multiple offers only where properties are hard to let**, with the intention of reducing void time if the property were refused. This is tied in to their wish to advertise properties during the notice period in order to speed up the process of letting. All four voters were in favour of using multiple offers on hard to let properties

### **Partner agencies**

**No consensus agreed.** The advantage is the reduction of void times. Disadvantage is frustration for those frequently coming 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>. Group was strongly **against multiple viewings**. Felt that bid limits and refusal penalties should be used to reduce speculative bidders and time wasters instead.

### **Accessibility Project Group**

The group was firmly against **multiple offers**. In order to cut down on refusals, and speed up the lettings process, anyone who had been offered a property should not be able to bid in the next round.

### **Consultation Project Group**

The option of **multiple Offers for hard-to-lets only** was favoured

### **Housing Needs Team**

Three groups were **against multiple offers**. Two groups, including the expert group, felt that **multiple offers should be used for hard-to-let properties**.

### **Oxford City Homes**

The majority of the group thought that **multiple offers** should be made for **hard-to-let properties**. From a **voids** perspective, **multiple offers** were favoured but viewings should be carried out on an "estate agent" successive appointment basis, rather than risking the difficulties of showing several applicants round at one time.

### **Other Authorities**

Many of the Locata landlords offer multiple viewings, but it is not a widely used option. Southampton City Council decided against multiple offers, as they felt support workers would

be unable to cope with the additional workload. It was also felt that multiple offers could lead to multiple disappointments, which in turn would lead to applicants disengaging from the scheme. However, they feel that this decision has contributed to an increase in void times.

### Summary

Some groups felt that **multiple offers** could successfully be used for **hard to let properties**, in order to reduce void times, though others felt they **should not be used at all**. Before this issue is decided, further work needs to be undertaken with the support agencies around accompanied viewings.

## **9 Other accommodation options provided**

CBL extended beyond Oxford/ private sector property/ shared ownership property

### **RSLs**

The group felt that at least initially only **shared ownership properties** should be included. Voting on this issue was too low to provide any useable information

### **Partner agencies**

- **CBL extended outside Oxford:** Group agreed “**no**”. Were concerned about net influx of tenants/homeless
- **Advertising Private Sector:** Group thought “**yes**” this would be a good idea and would be empowering to those considering the PR sector and would encourage choice.
- **Shared Ownership Property:** Group thought “**yes**” as this would encourage choice.

### **Accessibility Project Group**

- **Shared ownership** properties should be promoted through the scheme.
- There was no consensus on whether to offer **private sector** properties, though the group did agree that only properties of a guaranteed minimum standard should be included if they are offered.

### **Consultation Project Group**

Not discussed by this group

### **Housing Needs Team**

Four groups, including the expert team thought that all the options: **shared ownership, accommodation outside Oxford and private rented accommodation**. One group did not respond to this question.

### **Oxford City Homes**

Extending **outside Oxford** 8 votes, **private rented sector** property 6 votes, shared ownership 3 votes.

### **Other Authorities**

Vale of White Horse include **shared ownership** in their advertising, as do Eastleigh (Hampshire) and Camden. Hereford is among the many authorities that do not.

### Summary

Participants generally thought that it was important to concentrate on getting the CBL scheme right before introducing other elements or extending the area. However, there was wide support for advertising **shared ownership** properties, as they are part of the affordable housing sector. There was also support for bringing Home Choice **private properties** into the

scheme once it was up and running, and to research into the possibility and effects of extending outside Oxford.

## 10 Refusal penalties

No penalties/ penalties on some applicants/penalties on all unreasonable refusals

### RSLs

Opinion on this issue was divided, although the voting showed that the group was in favour of **some penalties** (1 vote against no penalties, 2 votes for penalties on some applicants). The group felt that analysis of refusals could be a useful tool for providers to improve their stock.

### Partner agencies

Group generally felt that **some penalties** should be used and it fits in with agency policies of offering people suitable options to meet their support needs “within available resources”. Strong feeling that penalties should apply equally to all groups, not just homeless.

### Accessibility Project Group

The group felt that if penalties are used, they must apply to all groups, otherwise there is the risk of stigmatising some groups. There was **no consensus** over whether penalties should be used at all.

### Consultation Project Group

Group felt that **refusal penalties** should be imposed on **some applicants**. Group favoured these where there were **multiple refusals**, but not purely based on category (eg homelessness).

### Housing Needs Team

Three groups thought that there should be **penalties for all unreasonable refusals**. The expert group thought that there should be **refusal penalties for some situations** to encourage people to move where necessary. One group did not answer this question.

### Oxford City Homes

Views were very split on this subject with 4, 3 and 2 votes respectively for some penalties, no penalties and penalties on all unreasonable refusals.

### Other Authorities

A wide variation in approaches. Many CBL schemes such as Locata **penalise those who have a high refusal rate**, especially if they are in a high priority group. For some, such as Camden this is seen as **compromising the principle of choice**.

### Summary

On the whole, groups felt that penalties should be used in some circumstances. Project groups and partner agencies felt strongly that penalties should NOT be based on categories such as homelessness, but just used in situations where there were multiple refusals. Shelter recommends that there should be no penalties for refusals from vulnerable households, as they argue that the increased void time will be compensated for by less tenancy turnover.

## 11 Direct offers

Used as required/in exceptional circumstances/not used

### RSLs

The group was keen that offers of accommodation should not be seen as a punishment, but nevertheless felt that the option should remain to make **direct offers in exceptional circumstances**, particularly to statutorily homeless applicants. This was reflected in the voting (2 for direct offers in exceptional circumstances only, 1 against no penalties).

### **Partner agencies**

**No consensus.** If direct offers are used, they should **be very limited**. If certain groups were consistently missing out you could try to reach them more effectively through their support agency (if they have one). Requested that for those who are not ready to move yet there should be some way of de-activating them without penalising them.

### **Accessibility Project Group**

There is concern that priority card holders would bid for properties they did not really want at the expiry time, rather than wait and receive a direct offer. The group felt that direct offers would lead to more appeals.

### **Consultation Project Group**

Group felt that **direct offers used in exceptional circumstances only**. This could be used as part of a “carrot & stick” approach with people to whom we have a legal duty. Direct offers should only be made where we have an obligation to house and where other incentives (eg priority cards) and persuasions (eg visit by an officer plus clear warning that a direct offer may be used) have failed.

### **Housing Needs Team**

Three groups thought that direct offers should be made in **exceptional circumstances**, with the expert group saying that they should only be very exceptional circumstances. One group felt that direct offers should be made as required and one group did not answer.

### **Oxford City Homes**

**Direct offers should be used as required:** 6 votes; in exceptional circumstances only: 2 votes.

### **Other Authorities**

Some authorities such as Camden feel that **direct offers compromise the principle of choice** and do not use them. The majority of authorities **reserve the right to make direct offers in circumstances** they consider to be appropriate, for example Kingston will make direct offers to homeless applicants who have not bid for two years (as long as suitable properties have been available to bid for). Brighton and Hove reserve the right to “place certain vulnerable people outside the CBL scheme” and make direct offers to them

### **Summary**

The consensus is to use **direct offers in limited or exceptional circumstances**

<h3><b>12 (&amp; 13) Waiting lists</b></h3>
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One list/ separate but aligned lists/ 3 distinct lists
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### **RSLs**

Representatives felt that **separate lists** enhance sustainability and improve targeting, and allow more possibility for transfer applicants to move.

### **Partner agencies**

No consensus reached

### **Accessibility Project Group**

**One list** enables users to make direct comparisons with other applicants. **Separate lists** make target setting easier.

### **Consultation Project Group**

Not discussed by this group.

### **Housing Needs Team**

Three groups, including the expert group, felt that there should be **separate, but aligned, lists**, with one group thinking there should only be one list. One group did not answer.

### **Other Authorities**

Research still to be done in this area

### **Summary**

This area needs further work before a decision can be made

<b>14 Pro-active/Outreach Work Pro-active/Outreach Work (to encourage voting especially amongst homeless applicants or others in high housing need)</b>
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Adverts used / direct letters/ visits received/ interagency working
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### **RSLs**

A particular issue for people with support needs, which may be even more important for people with out obvious or recognised support needs eg some people don't like to take control of their own lives. People should be monitored closely to find out why they are not bidding. Initially smart bidders will get properties while others are learning how to use the system. 1 vote for adverts, 2 for direct letters, and 1 for interagency working.

### **Partner Agencies**

A combination of visits received and interagency working was favoured. Group felt that CBL offers an opportunity for OCC and external agencies to have a fresh start and for links to be re-worked. Agencies can also play a key role in managing expectations.

### **Accessibility Project Group**

An effective scheme should include a way of identifying those applicants who have a support worker and making CBL part of their support package. It's important to acknowledge that different applicants have different levels of input from their support workers. There must be a mechanism to identify those who do not fall into distinct categories of vulnerability perhaps by identifying non bidders and contacting them through estate managers or partner landlords.

### **Consultation Project Group**

Not discussed by this group.

### **Housing Needs Team**

Four groups answered this question and all four felt that all of the options should be used. They put them in order of priority/when they should be used:

- Adverts -> inter-agency working -> visits -> letters
- Adverts -> visits -> letters -> inter-agency
- Inter-agency -> visits -> adverts -> letters
- Visits -> inter-agency working -> adverts -> letters (expert group)

**Letters were the least popular**, with most groups feeling that the Council's housing department already sends out too many letters. **The other options scored equally well.**

(Given a numerical value 1 - 4 depending on where they were placed: adverts & visits scored 12 each; inter-agency working 11 points; letters 4 points).

### **Oxford City Homes**

**Visits to non-bidding homeless applicants** were favoured by 8 out of 9 voters; conversely, interagency working was not wanted by 8 out of 9 voters.

### **Other Authorities**

Herefordshire Homepoint use a full range from general advice and encouragement in their property advertising through to visits to high priority applicants who are not bidding or are bidding inappropriately.

### **Summary**

The consensus is that if the scheme is to be accessible for all applicants, outreach work will be an essential part of it. Letters were not a popular option, as they are unlikely to appeal to those who are already excluded from the scheme. It is vital that housing officers carry out this outreach work, and it is desirable that partner agencies assist where appropriate. Adverts should also be used to support the process.