CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

- and -

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

- and -

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

- and -

VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL

_____

AGREEMENT
OXFORDSHIRE SUB-REGIONAL
CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

_____

Legal and Democratic Services
Town Hall
Blue Boar Street
Oxford
OX1 4EY

Contents

Appendices

Oxfordshire Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme Agreement

1   Parties to the Agreement

Cherwell District Council of Bodicote House, White Post Road, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA
Oxford City Council of Town Hall, Blue Boar Street, Oxford OX1 4EY
South Oxfordshire District Council of Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford, Wallingford, OX10 8ED
Vale of White Horse District Council of Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE
collectively "the Parties"

2   Objectives of the Agreement

This Agreement is the framework for the establishment of a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme, across the areas for which the Parties are responsible, plus any additional area agreed by all partners ("the Sub-region"), and the framework for the operation of such scheme, through the collaboration of the authorities and other stakeholders within the Sub-region
The Government has a target for all housing authorities to implement Choice Based Lettings by 2010. All the parties to this Agreement will meet this target and are working to implement Choice Based Lettings considerably earlier than this

Furthermore, the Government has encouraged authorities, and made funds available, to set up sub-regional schemes. In September 2006, the Parties to this Agreement submitted a bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for funding and were successful in this competitive bid. The bid is included at Appendix Six

The delivery of a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme for Oxfordshire ("the Scheme") is intended to improve customer choice further, and allow for increased mobility within the Sub-region. This is expected to assist with the Government's 'Sustainable Communities: Homes for All' agenda, and meet other service aims as set out in the sub-regional bid

It is proposed that the Parties to this Agreement form a Partnership with respect to the Scheme, and manage the sub-regional component of Choice Based Lettings through this Partnership ("the Scheme Partnership")

This is not a delegation of authority or control to the Scheme Partnership, and each function will require the approval of each of the Parties to this Agreement

3   Term of Agreement

This Agreement will commence from 1st January 2007

The Term of the Agreement shall be from 1st January 2007 to 31st July 2009

The term may be extended beyond 31st July 2009, for a further defined period, with the agreement of all the Parties

4   Structure

A Steering Group will manage the Scheme Partnership. The terms of reference and the duties of the Steering Group are as set out in Appendix One to this Agreement

The overall structure of the Scheme Partnership is as set out in Appendix Two

A Project Manager will be responsible for the delivery of the Scheme, with a Project Team

meeting to undertake specific tasks and to agree operational matters. The Project Team and any sub- groups will operate under the Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix Three

5   Staff

The Project Manager will work to the Job Description as set out in Appendix Four

The Project Manager will be employed by Oxford City Council, but will work under the direction of the Steering Group. Payment for the Project Manager will be by the Scheme Partnership

6   Funding

Oxford City Council is the Accountable Authority and the DCLG grant has been paid to Oxford City Council (as the lead authority in the grant submission) to the sum of £101,085

Unless otherwise agreed by the Steering Group, the expenditure on the Scheme will be broadly in line with the costings as set out in Appendix II of Appendix Six, and specifically, the Parties individual contributions to the funding of the Scheme, will be as set out in Appendix Seven

Oxford City Council will pay all bills approved by the Steering Group, and will receive contributions from Parties to this agreement and any other organisations or agencies that work with them

Match funding to the DCLG grant will be by way of contributions from the Parties. These may be paid to Oxford City Council to be used for payments made centrally, as set out above, or be payments direct from Parties to the Agreement to suppliers, as directed by the Steering Group

7   Delivery of Work Plan

It is expected that the Scheme Partnership will seek to deliver the Scheme in broad accordance with the project work plan as set out in Appendix Five

It is expected that this work plan may be amended and refined, from time to time, by the Steering Group

8   Monitoring and Review

The Steering Group will receive regular reports to highlight the progress of the Scheme implementation against the work plan; the spend against budget; and other management and performance data deemed relevant by them

In addition, the Scheme Partnership will submit half yearly reports to the Government (DCLG and Government Office of the South East) to update them on progress against the sub-regional bid submission

9   Miscellaneous Provisions

The Parties to this Agreement intend to involve local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) as partners in this Scheme and intend to include RSL representation on the Steering Group

At a later date, should another local authority, (e.g. West Oxfordshire) wish to join the Scheme Partnership, then they may be invited to enter into this Agreement by the Steering Group therefore increasing the size of the Sub-region

RSLs operating outside of the sub-region but with properties that may be attractive to applicants from the sub-region may participate in the Oxfordshire sub-regional scheme

This Agreement forms no legal partnership between the parties hereto, and neither party is authorised to make any commitment or enter into any obligation on behalf of the other. The Partnership Act of 1890 does not apply to this Agreement

10 Disputes and Other Matters

Should the Steering Group be unable to resolve an issue, it will be escalated to the Oxfordshire Housing Partnership (OHP) for a decision

11 Appendices

The Parties acknowledge and agree that the Appendices to this Agreement shall constitute an operative part of this Agreement

Appendices

1   Terms of Reference for the Steering Group

2   Overall Structure of the Sub-Regional Partnership

3   Terms of Reference for the Project Team and it's Sub-Groups

4   Job Description for Project Manager

5   Project Work Plan

6   The Oxfordshire CBL Partnership Bid for Sub-Regional CBL Funding

7   Financial Schedule

AS WITNESS hereof the parties hereto have signed this Agreement the day and year first before written

SIGNED for and on behalf of
CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL
By

Name of authorised signatory   )   …………………………….

Signature   )   …………………………….

Position   )   …………………………..

Signed for and on behalf of
OXFORD CITY COUNCIL
By

Name of authorised signatory   )   …………………………….

Signature   )   …………………………….

Position   )   …………………………..

Signed for and on behalf of
SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
By

Name of authorised signatory   )   …………………………….

Signature   )   …………………………….

Position   )   …………………………..

Signed for and on behalf of
VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL
By

Name of authorised signatory   )   …………………………….

Signature   )   …………………………….

Position   )   …………………………..

Appendix One
Terms of Reference for the Steering Group

Purpose:
The Steering Group is the key decision making group for the project. It is expected to provide the policy framework for the project and to monitor the work of the project against the plan. The Steering Group will be expected to ensure that the project is properly resourced and that each partner authority (and others) are performing as expected. Specifically, the Steering Group should:

- Appoint and oversee the work of the Project Manager
- Agree membership of the Project Team and sub-groups
- Authorise expenditure
- Brief/ Escalate to OHP
- Approve changes to the project plan or budget
- Resolve issues between partners
- Receive highlight reports
- Set tolerances for project

Group Membership:
The Steering Group will comprise of the following:

Housing Needs Manager	Oxford City Council
Head of Housing Services	South Oxfordshire DC
Accommodation & Homeless Manager	Cherwell District Council
Assistant Director of Housing Services & Community Safety	Vale of White Horse DC
	RSL representative
	Catalyst Communities HA, Home Buy Zone Agent rep
Supporting People team manager, Social & Community Services, Oxon County Council	Voluntary & Statutory Agency representative

Additional members may be co-opted at a later date, by the agreement of the group. In addition, GOSE may be invited to send a representative or/and the DCLG CBL Advisor may be invited to attend meetings. The Project Manager will also attend meetings.

If a member cannot attend a meeting, they may, on occasion, send a substitute, although it is expected that officers attending these meetings will have sufficient seniority to make decisions on behalf of their authority at the meeting. The quorum for the group is four.
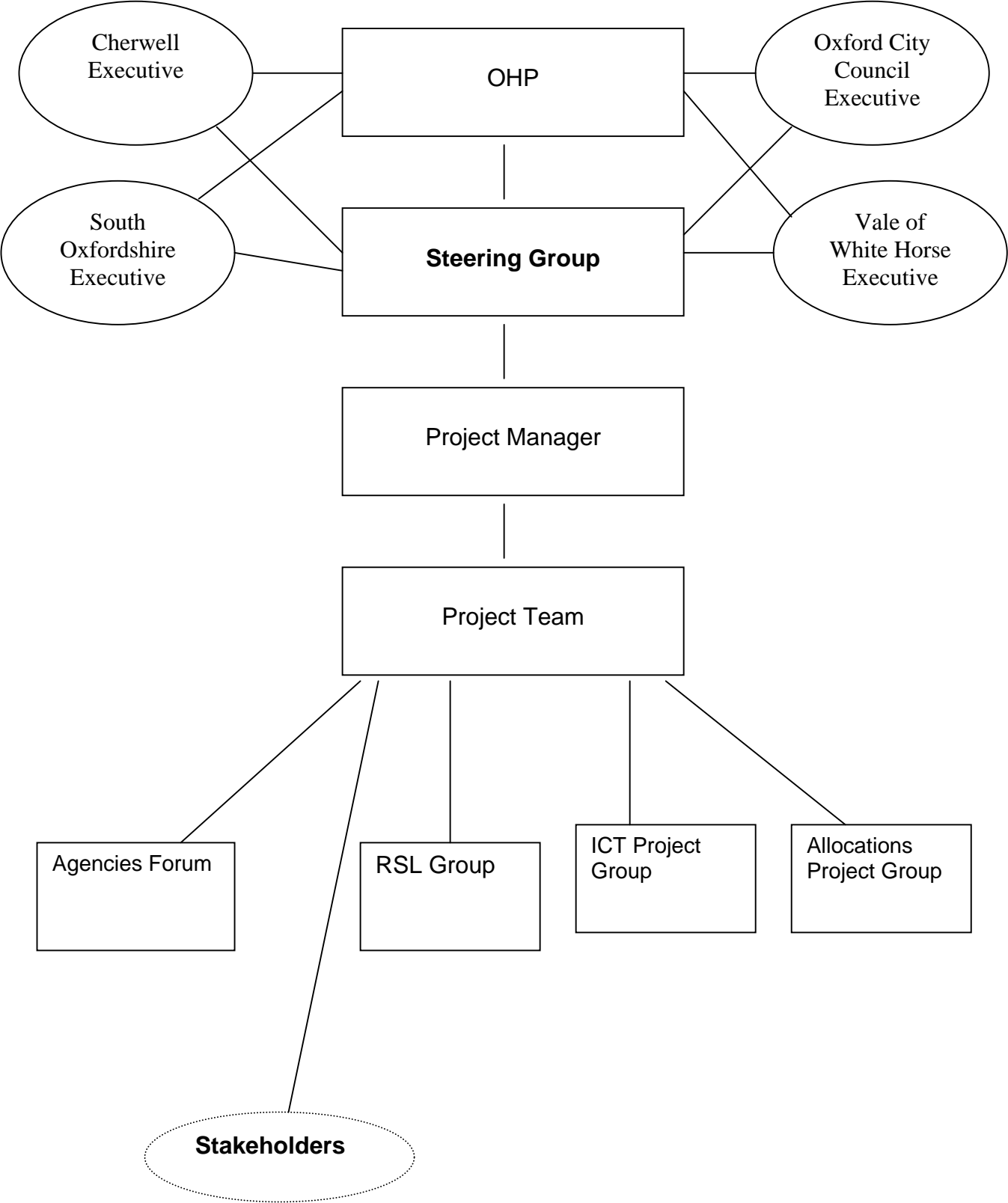
Frequency of meetings:
The Steering Group will meet every 2 months, or more frequently, if required

Voting:
It is expected that the group will run on a consensual basis. Should a vote be required, for a motion to be carried, the vote must be unanimous.

All meetings will be minuted with these circulated to members.

Appendix Two
Overall Structure of the Sub-Regional Partnership

```
  Cherwell                                      Oxford City
  Executive  ─────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌────  Council
                      └──│    OHP       │──┘      Executive
                         └──────┬───────┘
                                │
  South                ┌────────┴─────────┐        Vale of
  Oxfordshire ─────────│  Steering Group  │──────  White Horse
  Executive            └────────┬─────────┘        Executive
                                │
                       ┌────────┴─────────┐
                       │ Project Manager  │
                       └────────┬─────────┘
                                │
                       ┌────────┴─────────┐
                       │  Project Team    │
                       └──┬──┬──────┬──┬──┘
```

Agencies Forum   RSL Group   ICT Project   Allocations
                                   Group   Project Group

Stakeholders

Appendix Three
Terms of Reference for the Project Team and its Sub-Groups

Purpose:
- To agree and undertake specific tasks within the project plan, as agreed with the Project Manager
- To undertake tasks on behalf of and relevant to their authority
- To ensure the needs of their authority are communicated to the Project Manager

Group Membership:
The Project Team will comprise of the following (plus the Project Manager if not one of the below):

CBL Project Officer	Oxford City Council
Housing Needs Manager	South Oxfordshire DC
Abritas Project Officer	Cherwell District Council
Policy, Strategy & Enabling Officer	Vale of White Horse DC
	RSL representative
	Voluntary & Statutory Agency representative

Additional members may be co-opted at a later date, by the agreement of the group. If a member cannot attend a meeting, they may, on occasion, send a substitute, although it is expected that officers attending will be relatively consistent to help to work of the team.

Frequency of meetings:
The Project team will meet once per fortnight, or otherwise as required

Sub-Groups:
The Project Team may convene sub-groups to undertake specific tasks, as required. These will meet as frequently as needed. It is expected that these will include the following:

Agencies Forum
Role: To raise issues on behalf of clients directly affected by the implementation of sub-regional CBL
Composition: Interested agencies from across the districts who represent vulnerable clients

ICT Project Group
Role: To ensure the delivery of ICT to the project including appropriate interfaces with the districts
Composition: Representatives from each authority and Abritas

Allocations Project Group
Role: To work towards aligning allocations policies at various stages of the project
Composition: Senior allocations staff from each authority

9

Appendix Four
Job Description for Project Manager

The Project Manager will be expected to undertake the following duties:

- Produce the project plan, ensuring that the project is properly planned and scoped
- Manage the delivery of the project in accordance with timescales and budgets
- Negotiate delivery of the project with stakeholders
- Ensure co-ordination of implementation across the sub-region
- Resolve problems
- Monitor progress
- Identify and manage risks
- Produce regular reports to Steering Group and other stakeholders
- Facilitate the Steering Group meetings
- Produce six-monthly monitoring reports for the DCLG and GOSE
- Convene and chair meetings of the Project Team
- Convene meetings of the Sub Groups
- Oversee any procurement authorised by the Steering Group
- Be responsible for the communication strategy

Appendix Five
Project Work Plan

(Subject to ongoing review by Steering Group)

Date	Action	Responsibility
Jan - March 07	- Partners meet - Set up Project Board - Agree project management - Negotiate partnership agreement - Meet with Abritas develop Project Plan - Obtain firm quote from Abritas for CBL ICT plus any additions required	- OCC Project team - OCC Project team - Partner Authorities - Partner Authorities - OCC Project team - Sub Regional Project Manager (SRPM)
April 07	- Sign contracts or addendums as required - Meet with RSLs - Meet with statutory/voluntary agencies - Finalise partnership agreement - Consultancy stage	- Partner A's & Abritas - Partner Authorities - SRPM - Partner Authorities - SRPM
May 07	- Make necessary alignments to priority schemes for Phase 1 and, in particular, develop common/ interchangeable scheme for properties available for inter-district moves - Develop buddying scheme between RSLs - Establish forum with vol and stat agencies to explore: joint working, accessibility etc (ongoing) - Abritas to develop and test system in accordance with agreed spec (ongoing)	- Sub regional project group (PG) - SRPM - SRPM - SRPM & Abritas (overseen by steering group)
June 07	- Agree and sign off configuration specification - Establish working group to sharing best practice and formalising protocols on housing advice and housing options (to continue throughout project) - Set up working group to explore best ways of joint working (ongoing)	- Steering Group - Partner authorities and RSLs, facilitated by SRPM - SRPM/ Allocations Group

July 07	- Set up ICT, to include internet, automated telephone and SMS capability - Develop common web portal for region - Define areas where stock from partners and RSLs is excluded from CBL - Scheme testing (ongoing) - Develop links with zone agents - Abritas to develop and test system in accordance with agreed spec	- SRPM & Partner A's Abritas, overseen by SG - Abritas overseen by SRPM/SG - SRPM - SRPM / Partner As - SRPM - Abritas
Aug 07	- Begin work on common application form (on going) - Develop advertising formats. - User acceptance testing and sign off	- SRPM - Abritas/ SRPM/ SG - Partner authorities and RSLs
Sept 07	- Marketing scheme across sub region - Ironing out glitches - User acceptance testing and sign off	- SRPM & Partner authorities and RSLs - SRPM - Partner A's & RSLs
Oct 07	- Staff and RSL training - Developing monitoring and evaluation criteria - Training for vol & stat agencies	- Abritas/ SRPM - SRPM - SRPM
Nov 07	Ongoing Preparation for launch	All parties
Dec 07	- Go live for OCC & Cherwell - Scheme "bedding down", responding to issues arising - Phase 1 monitoring and evaluation	- OCC/Cherwell, SRPM & Abritas - Partners - Partners & SRPM
Jan – March 08	- Scheme "bedding down", responding to issues arising - Phase 1 monitoring and evaluation - Go live for South, Vale & inter-district - Phase 1 monitoring and evaluation - Report on monitoring and evaluation	- Partners &SRPM - SRPM - All parties - SRPM - SRPM
Apr - June 08	- Make amendments to scheme based on monitoring - Develop links with private rented	- All parties - Abritas with Steering Group

13	sector • Work on common application forms (ongoing to project end) • Work towards CHR across region (ongoing to project end) • Work towards a common allocations policy (ongoing to project end) • Develop interactive website to give basic housing options advice • Work to include PRS directly in scheme • Work to introduce one-stop shops to include sub-region wide housing options and housing law advice service	• & SRPM • SRPM • SRPM • SRPM • SRPM • SRPM/ Partner A's / Abritas • SRPM
July - Sept 08	• Review and continue work with vol and stat agencies • Continue and review consultation with members RSLs and scheme users • Continue on going work	• SRPM • SRPM • SRPM and all parties
Oct – Dec 08	• Review amount of stock in sub regional scheme • Consider unrestricted inter-district mobility • Establish Phase 2 monitoring and evaluation criteria • Launch Phase 2 of Scheme	• Partners & SRPM • Partners • SRPM • All parties
Jan – July 09	• Scheme bedding down, responding to issues arising • Monitoring and evaluation of Phase 2 • Scheme bedding down, responding to issues arising • Monitoring and evaluating of Phase 2 • Report on M & E • Amendments to Phase 2 based on Report	• Partners • SRPM • Partners • Steering Group • Project Group • Partners

The Oxfordshire Choice Based Lettings Partnership

Proposals for Government funding to support the development of a Choice Based Lettings Scheme for the Oxfordshire Sub-Region

Partners to Scheme

Oxford City Council	(retained own stock)
Vale of White Horse District Council	(stock transferred out)
Cherwell District Council	(stock transferred out)
South Oxfordshire District Council	(stock transferred out)

Index to the Oxfordshire Bid

* sections have been referenced as per the headings in the DCLG bid instructions for ease of reference

---

A. Lead Authority & Officer for Contact

Oxford City Council

Susan Harbour   01865 252748   sharbour@oxford.gov.uk   (Mon/ Tues/ Wed am)

Kate Winstanley   01865 252145   kwinstanley@oxford.gov.uk   (Wed/ Thurs/ Fri)

Choice Based Lettings Project Officers   (job share)

Oxford City Council, Choice Based Lettings Project Team,
St Aldates' Chambers, 109-113 St Aldates', Oxford, OX1 1DS

B. Introduction to the Oxfordshire Partnership and our proposed scheme

The Oxfordshire partnership consists of 4 of the 5 Oxfordshire local authorities. These authorities have been involved in partnership working in their housing allocations and are looking to develop this further. Oxfordshire is the most rural county in the South East[1] but with some significant urban areas. All areas of Oxfordshire have extremely high housing demand. The sub-region is mixed, combining not only rural and urban, but also a district with retained stock and others with stock transferred. In terms of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) the sub-region is also mixed, with one authority having an established and well-regarded CBL scheme, with the others at different stages of implementation. West Oxfordshire DC does not have member support for CBL, but we are developing the scheme to allow them to join later, and will continue to encourage them to do so.

The plan is to implement the scheme in two phases. **Phase 1** will take place between January & October 2007. This phase will include setting up the sub-regional CBL, formalising the partnership and going live with the basic scheme. **Phase 2** will take place between January & December 2008 and will include evolving Phase 1 and adding value to the scheme – in particular, working towards commonality, aligned and, if possible, a single system. More details are given in *Appendix I.*

We believe that it will be far more efficient, and provide better value for money, if the schemes can be developed together, rather than attempting to align them once they have been implemented. With 3 authorities planning to implement CBL schemes over the next year, this would be an ideal time for us to develop a sub-regional scheme.

C. Description of existing scheme operating by one partner

The Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC) has been operating a CBL scheme since September 2004 and is the only authority in Oxfordshire which has launched CBL to date. This scheme covers 100% of new lets including Shared Ownership properties and can be used by 22 RSLs in the District. The current Housing Register has 3,130 applicants who are able to bid via the Internet, in person at the Council's one-stop shops, and also via phones. To date over 533 applicants have been housed via CBL. Levels of bidding via the internet have been high since launch with 79.85% of bids made via the Council's dedicated CBL website at www.valehomechoice.org.uk

D1. Landlords participating in the scheme

We have already had comments from the following major landlords to participate in the scheme and wishing to join the partnership:

Vale HA*	Bromford Housing*	Stonham Housing
SOHA Housing*	Cherwell HA*	Paradigm HA
Banbury Homes	Charter Community Housing	Oxford Citizens HA
Jephson HA	Housing 21*	Catalyst Communities
Thames Valley HA*	Banbury Homes	Charter Community Homes

* are part of an existing CBL scheme

These landlords, together with Oxford City Council, hold 97% of the social housing stock in the four districts partnering for this scheme.

---

[1] Source: DEFRA

The partnership plans to bring other smaller landlords on board. We will be looking at best practice from elsewhere and developing innovative approaches to engage other providers.

D2. Other agencies supporting the scheme

Voluntary/ Statutory Agencies supporting the scheme are:

Oxford Nightshelter (Homelessness)   Julian Housing (Homelessness)
Connection, floating support team   Wallingford CAB
Oxfordshire Mind   Didcot CAB
The Elmore Team (mental health services)   Oxford City CAB
Adult Learning Disability Service (Oxon County   RAF Benson CAB
Council Social & Community Services)

E. Stock to be in the scheme

All partners have agreed to put between 90 -100% of all stock and nominations (existing and new) into the scheme. RSLs will be encouraged to commit to similar levels of stock (where not already committed through nomination agreements). This has already been achieved in Oxford City and VWHDC, through existing partnership agreements.

F. Description of the scheme

(1) Key Objectives of the Scheme
- To offer a scheme which is consistent, transparent and fair and customer led
- To give home seekers clear information and feedback about their situation in an area of high demand, assisting them to make informed decisions
- To develop and promote a consistent housing options approach throughout the region, and to strengthen and develop existing links with private sector landlords
- To increase the pool of properties from which home seekers can choose. Adopting a sub regional CBL scheme will encourage social and private sector landlords to participate, by offering those with stock across the region a single "market place" for their vacancies
- To offer homeless applicants greater choice by being eligible to participate in the CBL scheme
- To support sustainable communities by encouraging choice
- To enable better mobility across the county to tackle housing and employment needs; this is particularly important in Oxfordshire which is the most rural county in the South East, and where public transport links across the county are limited
- The process of obtaining affordable housing will be simplified for applicants. The scheme will introduce a single application form for home-seekers, giving access to the majority of social housing stock in the region and giving access to housing information via a single web portal
- By developing a joint approach to housing options, based on best practice, the partners will be able to offer an enhanced service to home seekers. The partners also hope to encourage other local housing providers and agencies to adopt similar schemes or to join the sub regional scheme
- The partners will promote social inclusion by supporting vulnerable applicants in the CBL process, and by increasing access to services by better partnership working with statutory and voluntary agencies across the region. Support agencies will be able to offer more effective support to their clients with one system in place across the county
- To provide a consistent source of data on housing need across the sub-region

(2) The scheme will offer greater choice to applicants, including homeless applicants. Applicants will play an active part in vacancy selection. Partner authorities will adopt the same bidding methods meaning that all four will be able to offer internet, automated telephone, Minicom, SMS text and paper coupons. This would not be financially viable if authorities operated individually, so giving home-seekers greater choice and opportunity of bidding.

Due to the high level of housing need, homeless applicants are currently made a limited number of reasonable offers of accommodation (1 for Oxford City, 1 for South Oxfordshire, 3 for Cherwell). Restricting areas of preference also negatively affects ability to be housed. Sub-Regional CBL would increase the choices for both homeless and general register applicants. A sub regional CBL scheme would give all home seekers the opportunity to choose property and location. No groups would be excluded from CBL, including those in hostel accommodation.

Good, clear information on the availability of properties by type and location, and information on previously successful applicants will enable home-seekers to make realistic choices about property types and areas. CBL will give them the freedom to constantly update their preferences to improve their chances of being housed.

Oxford City Council has already developed a consultation group with voluntary and statutory agencies to consider ways to best support and enable vulnerable clients and to ensure that all groups can fully benefit from CBL. This will be extended across the sub-region and will help to shape the final scheme.

All partners will advertise properties on a fortnightly cycle on the website and through a free newssheet. Details will also be kept in the offices of all partners, plus voluntary and statutory agencies, libraries and other community facilities. Home seekers can express an interest via the website, SMS text, automated telephone (or Minicom). The band and date of successful applicants will be published to enable other home seekers to make informed bids.

(3) Pilot. A decision has been taken not to pilot the scheme. Instead we will be drawing on the experience of the VWHDC, our experienced CBL partner. We will be using their monitoring and evaluation to help shape the scheme. In addition, there will be two phases to the scheme, and each phase will be evaluated.

(4) Shared and low cost home ownership options within the scheme. These are important initiatives in the region, where approximately 60% indigenous population cannot afford to buy housing on the open market[2]. We will work with zone agents, Catalyst Communities HA who wish to join the partnership and will be represented on the project board. The sub regional CBL scheme will improve accessibility to shared and low cost ownership by increasing the number of advertising outlets and making information consistently available throughout the region. Information will be available at all partner offices and staff will receive appropriate training. Marketing will be consistent with work and travel patterns rather than limited by local authority boundaries.

(5) Private rented sector. It is recognised by all parties that the private rented sector plays an important part in housing home seekers in Oxfordshire. There are opportunities for this sector to be better used by the partner authorities, and a number of innovative schemes (eg the Home Choice scheme in use at Oxford City) already exist. During **Phase 1**, the partnership will work to develop and enhance schemes across the sub region to produce

---

[2] ODPM report on housing in the South East

economies of scale and the sharing of best practice. During **Phase 2,** the partnership will work towards including private sector properties, which are part of specific schemes, in CBL. Private rented properties will also be advertised on the website outside of CBL, subject to local and national licensing, registration and standards schemes for the sector. During phase 2 the partnership will look at best practice elsewhere (both within and outside local government) to ensure that standards in the private rented sector are as high as possible, and advertised properties will be labelled to say which standards they meet.

(6) Details of partners' housing options approaches and plans to adopt such an approach as part of the CBL scheme. The partners are at different stages though all have made progress towards implementing a housing options approach. This includes: negotiating with landlords; offering family mediation; use of rent deposit guarantee and rent in advance schemes; providing up to date lists of private accommodation and referrals to letting agencies; close liaison with housing benefit; home visits to provide targeted responses; links to support services and health, drop in services; advice on homelessness and landlord and tenant rights; restructuring staff teams to focus on homelessness prevention; money advice and advice on domestic violence and relationship breakdown.

During **Phase 1,** partners will concentrate on sharing best practice and developing and formalising existing and new protocols. During **Phase 2**, the partnership will look at introducing one stop shops, which will include a sub-region wide housing options and housing law advice service.

(7) Common housing register. Cherwell and the VWHDC operate common housing registers. Oxford City's Common Housing Register will be introduced in November 2006 and South Oxfordshire are working to introduce one. The partners will work towards a sub regional common housing register during **Phase 2** (see also below).

(8) Common allocation scheme or common prioritisation criteria. A sub regional CBL scheme is welcomed by all the partners as an opportunity to focus on partnership work and provide a consistent approach to home seekers. The partners will align prioritisation schemes and will introduce common procedures where appropriate, including developing a common application form. The opportunities to work jointly will include the possibility of incremental change resulting in closer working practices. This will lead to service improvements from sharing best practice and efficiencies. During Phase 2, the partners will work towards introducing common prioritisation criteria.

(9) Mobility between local authority districts within the scheme. 10% general rented lets (including nominations), and 100% sheltered and disabled adapted stock will be made available for inter-district moves. This will be kept under review, with a view to increasing if appropriate. The partnership will link growth/ new bid properties to Housing Corporation funding allocations across the sub region. The website will include links to mutual exchange information other relevant websites such as MoveUK.

(10) Monitoring and evaluation.
The scheme will be monitored and evaluated to:
- Provide helpful information for other sub regional schemes
- Ensure continuous improvement of the service to customers
- Fulfil partners' strategic housing roles
- Ascertain whether home seekers are having difficulty accessing the scheme and enable the partners to undertake work to overcome barriers to CBL
- Encourage new partners, particularly West Oxfordshire DC to join the scheme

Tenants and statutory and voluntary agencies will be involved in the evaluation process, and will be consulted on how they wish to be included.

(11) Regional and sub-Regional Housing Strategies.
The scheme is consistent with regional and sub regional strategies which seek to meet the needs of diverse communities in an area of high housing need, and recognises that joint working will help to deliver a strategic approach. Until a sub regional CBL scheme is offered, cross county mobility will remain extremely limited for social housing tenants.

G. Approval for the scheme and consultation

The partner councils have consulted on their main CBL schemes in a variety of ways, including: surveying home seekers/ residents, support agencies[3], BME and faith groups and RSLs; holding a public meetings, sending out newsletters to home seekers/tenants; attending tenants and residents meetings; surveying homeless people; undertaking working groups and other consultation with RSLs and support agencies; undertaking focus groups with a sample of home seekers/tenants; using citizens panel and consulting with town and parish councils and landlord forums. VWHDC have held post launch consultation exercises and also carry our rolling monthly Quality Monitoring of new households entered onto the Housing Register.

The three districts yet to implement CBL schemes have found substantial tenant and home seeker support for the principles of CBL. This view was supported by the voluntary and statutory agencies who advise and advocate for vulnerable people who are also home-seekers. VWHDC have undertaken post-implementation research showing a strong majority of respondents preferring CBL to the previous allocations system and finding it easy to understand.

At its meeting on 21 July, the Oxfordshire Members Affordable Housing Group (OMAHG) received a paper on the opportunity to bid for sub regional CBL. All except West Oxfordshire agreed to support a bid being made. OMAHG consists of housing cabinet members, strategic directors and representatives from Oxfordshire County Council. In addition, this bid has the support of all housing cabinet/ portfolio members in all 4 partners.

If the partnership is successful in the bid we intend to undertake further consultation using existing mechanisms: e.g. tenant newsletters, citizens panels, tenants and residents groups and voluntary and statutory agencies. We also aim to get full executive approval from each of the partners within three months of the bid outcome, and prior to drawing down funds.

H. Sharing Good Practice
*   Partners will continue to share good practice and lessons learned with other authorities and RSLs and with government departments
*   By maintaining a high profile for the scheme the partners anticipate that other housing providers in the region will be encouraged to join on an incremental basis, and offer the same levels of choice to their residents, and the scheme will be designed to allow this to happen

I. Outline Timetable For The Project
Brief outline below, detail at Appendix I

---

[3] Support agencies include those working with: homeless, young people, elderly, learning disabled, people with mental issues; asylum seekers, and BME groups.

Oct – Dec 2006 Project Set up	Jan – July 07 Project consultation; Development of Phase 1; Scheme testing	Aug – Oct 07 Marketing and Preparation
Oct 07 Launch Phase 1 of scheme	Oct 07 – March 08 Phase 1 Monitoring and Evaluation	March – Dec 08 Development of Phase 2
Jan 09 Launch Phase 2	Jan – July 09 Phase 2 Monitoring and Evaluation	

J1. Costings And Funding Applied For From The DCLG
The full budget is attached at Appendix II
The total start up cost of this scheme is £219,750 of which we are asking the DCLG for a 46% contribution which is equivalent to £101,085.

The costings are mostly capital (77%), with 23% spent on resource costs. None of the costs applied for are recurrent scheme operating costs as these will be met by the partnership. The largest costs are project management and ICT: all of which fall under capital costs, which is why the budget is weighted in these percents.
Costs shown are for 3 partners to tender for a new ICT system, plus an upgrade to the Vale's system, so that all systems will be linked.

J2. Value For Money
Our sub regional scheme will provide an enhanced service through a common approach and lack of repetition. In particular this will include:
- Offering choice will reduce the amount of refusals, the length of void times and the length of time in temporary accommodation
- To promote partnership working, and increase efficiency by sharing services and avoiding duplication where possible. ICT procurement, training and project management costs will be shared between the partners, allowing initiatives which could not be justified by individual authorities. (e.g. talking heads translation software)
- Partners will align advertising and letting cycles, meaning that advertising costs will be reduced, and advertisements will be more cost effective
- Partners will have a 2 week cycle and will advertise their properties together on the web and in paper format for greater efficiencies
- Partners will be able to offer a wide range of services to home seekers – e.g. all authorities will be able to offer SMS text bidding which they could not otherwise afford
- Advertising of properties will be in a better format, more widely distributed, and at a lower cost per authority
- Shared costs will make it easier for West Oxfordshire to join the scheme as it will be less expensive than developing their own scheme later
- RSL costs will be lowered as they will only be participating in one scheme across the sub-region
- Shared resources will enable partners to develop innovative schemes across the sub-region, adding additional services for the benefit of all customers
- Sharing resources will be less expensive

In particular, value for money will be achieved by developing the partners' schemes together now, rather than aligning them after the implementation of the individual CBL schemes. Three districts are due to implement CBL schemes in the autumn of 2008 and would welcome the opportunities for increased joint working and aligning of the schemes that a successful bid would allow. Vale of White Horse District Council are keen to amend and enhance their schemes to align it with their partners.

21

Appendix I

Outline Timetable for the Implementation of Oxfordshire sub-regional Choice Based Lettings.

Oct – Dec 2006

Set up Project Board to include representation from RSLs and voluntary and statutory agencies
Negotiate partnership agreement
Appoint Project Manager

Jan – July 07

Undertake consultation with scheme users, RSLs, statutory and voluntary agencies, and members
Develop Phase 1 of model scheme, to include:

- Develop advertising formats
- Set up ICT, to include internet, automated telephone and SMS capability. Also to include interfacing different systems where necessary
- Align different allocation priority schemes
- Begin work on a common application form
- Define areas where stock from partners and RSLs is excluded from CBL
- Develop a "buddying" scheme between RSLs; particularly those with small amounts of stock in the area.
- Develop links with the private rented sector
- Sharing best practice and formalising protocols on housing advice and housing options
- Develop monitoring and evaluation criteria for aspects of the scheme to be implemented in Phase 1
- Develop common web portal for the region
- Develop links with the zone agents to ensure that low cost and shared ownership properties are strongly linked with CBL
- Working group of all partner authorities to meet to explore better ways of joint working
- Develop interactive website to give basic housing options advice
- Establish forum with voluntary and statutory agencies across the sub region to explore: ways further joint working; supporting vulnerable clients and making the scheme accessible
- Scheme testing

Aug – Oct 2007

Marketing scheme across the sub region
Preparation for launch

Oct 2007
Launch Phase 1 of scheme

Oct – Dec 2007

Scheme "bedding down", responding to issues arising

Oct 2007 – March 2008

Phase 1 monitoring and evaluation

March 2008

Make amendments to scheme based on monitoring

March – Dec 2008

Prepare for Phase 2, to include:
- Work towards a single priority scheme across the sub region
- Complete work on common application forms
- Work towards a Common housing Register across the sub region
- Review the amount of stock in the sub-regional scheme and increase if appropriate
- Work to include private landlords directly in CBL
- Work to introduce one stop shops which will include a sub-region wide housing options and housing law advice service
- Continue work forum work with voluntary and statutory agencies
- Continue consultation with members, RSLs, voluntary & statutory agencies and scheme users
- Work towards a common allocations policy
- Give further consideration to unrestricted inter-district mobility

Jan 2008

Launch Phase 2

Jan – July 2009

Monitoring, evaluation and amendments to Phase 2

23

Appendix II: Detailed costings

Capital Costs	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Total	DCLG funding @ 46%	Balance
Software & licences		36,500			**36,500**	16,790	19,710
Consultancy	5,000	10,000	2,000		**17,000**	7,820	9,180
Set up email, phone, text, coupon bidding, interfaces		10,750			**10,750**	4,945	5,805
System set up		23,000			**23,000**	10,580	12,420
Additional charges for capacity, agreements etc		500	1,000	500	**2,000**	920	1,080
Project Manager	10,000	40,000	30,000		**80,000**	36,800	43,200
Total Capital costs	**15,000**	**120,750**	**33,000**	**500**	**169,250**	**77,855**	**91,395**
Revenue costs	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Total	DCLG funding @ 46%	Balance
Legal & Accountancy	1,000	2,500	1,500		**5,000**	2,300	2,700
Training		5,000	3,000		**8,000**	3,680	4,320
Newssheet devt & design		4,000		500	**4,500**	2,070	2,430
Publicity materials & guide		20,000	5,000		**25,000**	11,500	13,500
Translation costs (Phases 1 & 2)		1,500	1,500	500	**3,500**	1,610	1,890
Promotional events		3,000	500	1,000	**4,500**	2,070	2,430
Total Revenue costs	**1,000**	**36,000**	**11,500**	**2,000**	**50,500**	**23,230**	**27,270**
Total Costs	**16,000**	**156,750**	**44,500**	**2,500**	**219,750**	**101,085**	**118,665**

Total Funding (%)	Capital	Revenue	Costs borne by partnership	DCLG funding
	77	**23**	**54**	**46**

Appendix III

Voluntary and Statutory Agencies in Oxfordshire, consulted about choice based lettings.

Oxfordshire County Council Social and Community Services
Children and Families
Adult Learning Disability
Asylum Team
Supporting People Team
Connection
Connexions
Elmore Team
Oxfordshire Mind
Turpin Miller Higgins (solicitors with Housing Advice contract)
Didcot CAB
Wallingford CAB
RAF Benson CAB
Oxford CAB
Oxford Nightshelter
Julian Housing
Simon House
Agnes Smith Advice Centre
Gateway Project
Windmill House
Anchor Staying Put
Community Mental Health Teams

Appendix 7 - Sub-Regional Scheme Set up CBL costs

Phase 1 - initial costs (2007/08)		OCC		CDC		SODC		VOWH		Total
Common hub	£	6,525	£	6,525	£	6,525	£	6,525	£	26,100
Oxford City on hub	£	9,325	£	-	£	-	£	-	£	9,325
Oxford city interfaces	£	3,600	£	-	£	-	£	-	£	3,600
Cherwell on hub	£	-	£	9,325	£	-	£	-	£	9,325
Cherwell housing register changes	£	-	£	9,400	£	-	£	-	£	9,400
SODC on hub	£	-	£	-	£	9,325	£	-	£	9,325
SODC housing register changes	£	-	£	-	£	9,400	£	-	£	9,400
VOWH on hub	£	-	£	-	£	-	£	7,675	£	7,675
VOWH housing register changes	£	-	£	-	£	-	£	8,800	£	8,800
License	£	12,150	£	12,150	£	12,150	£	-	£	36,450
Automatic band calculation in client feed	£	600	£	600	£	600	£	600	£	2,400
CTI set up (standard script, multiple languages)	£	813	£	813	£	813	£	813	£	3,252
Auto bidding for vulnerable clients	£	650	£	650	£	650	£	650	£	2,600
Escrow agreement	£	-		£760	£	-	£	-	£	760
SMS bidding	£	1,150	£	1,150	£	-	£	-	£	2,300
Project management costs (2007/08)	£	5,725	£	5,725	£	5,725	£	5,725	£	22,900
Talking heads (excluding translation costs)	£	2,231	£	2,231	£	2,231	£	2,231	£	8,925
sub-total	£	**42,769**	£	**49,329**	£	**47,419**	£	**33,019**		**£172,537**
DCLG contribution	£	17,108	£	19,732	£	18,968	£	24,764	£	80,572
%		40%		40%		40%		75%		
Net costs to each LA (Phase 1)	£	**25,662**	£	**29,598**	£	**28,452**	£	**8,255**	£	**91,965**

Phase 2 costs (2008/09)		OCC		CDC		SODC		VOWH		Total
Other costs (training, expenses, publicity)	£	1,500	£	1,500	£	1,500	£	1,500	£	6,000
Project management costs (2008/09)	£	7,500	£	7,500	£	7,500	£	7,500	£	30,000
sub-total	£	**9,000**	£	**9,000**	£	**9,000**	£	**9,000**	£	**36,000**
DCLG contribution	£	5,128	£	5,128	£	5,128	£	5,128	£	20,513
Net costs to each LA (Phase 2)	£	**3,872**	£	**3,872**	£	**3,872**	£	**3,872**	£	**15,488**

Total Implementation Costs		OCC		CDC		SODC		VOWH		Total
Total	£	**51,769**	£	**58,329**	£	**56,419**	£	**42,019**		**£208,537**
DCLG contribution	£	22,236	£	24,860	£	24,096	£	29,893		£101,085
Total net cost to each LA	£	**29,533**	£	**33,469**	£	**32,323**	£	**12,127**		**£107,452**

Annual or ongoing costs		OCC		CDC		SODC		VOWH		Total
Support and maintenance	£	4,620	£	4,080	£	4,080	£	2,010	£	14,790
Hosting	£	3,500	£	2,000	£	2,000	£	1,000	£	8,500
Telephony costs (0800)	£	3,800	£	3,800	£	3,800	£	3,800	£	15,200
Escrow agreement	£	-	£	760	£	-	£	-	£	760
SMS costs	£	3,070	£	3,070	£	-	£	-	£	6,140
Browsealoud (or alternative)	£	949	£	949	£	949	£	949	£	3,795
Printing costs	£	1,500	£	1,500	£	1,500	£	1,500	£	6,000
Talking Heads	£	2,550	£	2,550	£	2,550	£	2,550	£	10,200
Annual costs	£	**19,989**	£	**18,709**	£	**14,879**	£	**11,809**	£	**65,385**