Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2
Housing and Environment

18 May 2010

Briefing Note – Choice Based Letting (CBL)
Appreciative Inquiry

1 Background

1.1 At the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment) held on 29 January 2009, the Committee received a wide-ranging report on Choice Based Lettings.

1.2 It was agreed that an Appreciative Inquiry, comprising Councillor John Yates (Lead), Councillors Pam Varnsverry, Tess Scott and Colin Lill be set up to provide comment on Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system to date.

2 Information

2.1 After the initial meeting of the Appreciative Inquiry, the Group was satisfied that the CBL system was embedding in and beginning to function very well but the need to revisit the system after it had been running for some time was recognised.

2.2 Details of a Customer Satisfaction Survey that had been issued to 200 customers who had been housed through CBL was provided to the Appreciative Inquiry. The headline figures from the Survey: -

- 159 responses
- 38.6% indicated the services was excellent
- 48% - good
- 11.54% - Fair
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2.3 Comments made by customers included:

- The Kiosk is easy to use
- The advert is clear and easy to read
- It is a transparent and fair system

2.4 A Survey had also been issued to 5,000 customers of whom 1,189 had been returned. The headline facts were very similar to those from the CBL Survey:

- 80-90% positive comments
- Customers appreciated the open, transparent nature of the process

3 Conclusions

3.1 A report on Choice Based Lettings will be submitted to Cabinet at its meeting of July 2010

3.2 Three meetings of the Appreciative Inquiry were held and various issues challenged. There were no outstanding issues other than the promotion of the Choice Based Lettings Logo, which the Group was assured, would be rectified. The Appreciative Inquiry noted that the recent restructure of Housing Services had allowed for Officers to assist vulnerable people and was working well with positive outcomes. It is highlighted that the comments and observations of the Appreciative Inquiry have been taken into consideration in production of the report to Cabinet.

3.3 The areas of change for the Choice Based Lettings Scheme that the Appreciative enquiry identified that will be implemented are as follows:

- Weekly Choice Based Lettings scheme adverts moving from fortnightly
- Producing weekly newsletters for customers and researching other methods of written communication other than the Chronicle and Echo newspaper to improve cover and customer satisfaction
- Community Language translation services on the Choice Based Lettings web site
- Linking the Choice Based Lettings scheme web site with Northampton Borough Council’s employment creation and education/training development work for customers
- Under-occupation scheme re-launched to address greater needs
- Developing a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme with Daventry District Council

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- The introduction of a regular text messaging information service to customers
- The introduction of weekly out of hours surgeries for customers taking place between 6 to 8pm at the Guildhall on Thursday’s
- Linking the Home Improvement and Disabled Facilities Grant work with the Choice Based Lettings scheme
- Publication of a six monthly newsletter to all customers on the Housing Register breaking down the myths and false perceptions, but also providing news on new initiatives and possible options to provide solutions to customers re-housing needs.
- Conducting six monthly customer satisfaction surveys in place of the current annual satisfaction surveys
- Designing an accessible housing register that sits within the Choice Based Lettings scheme to have a single data base for Northampton of all adapted and accessible affordable housing.

Brief Author: Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor John Yates, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Choice Based Lettings Appreciative Inquiry

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