

## Equality Impact Assessment - Stage Three Telling the Story

### Name of service area/policy/strategy reviewed

Allocations Policy

### What were the issues?

Consultation undertaken and who was engaged:

- Ben Ollier – Allocations & Supported Housing Team Leader
- Emma Hartley – Continuous Improvement Manager
- Halton Residents through work on a TSA Local Standards Pilot re: Allocations

### **Tenant consultation in Halton in conjunction with TAROE**

As part of the work that CHA have been doing in Halton working on the Merseyside sub regional choice based lettings and local allocations standards, an exercise was carried out to consult with tenants. The consultation was carried out on behalf of the Registered Providers and looked at the following groups: -

- Customers on the waiting list
- Existing customers that have recent experience of housing allocations
- Longstanding existing customers
- Existing customers with direct access to regulated housing
- Customers that have accessed regulated housing via the 'statutory homelessness' route
- Residents of both Widnes and Runcorn
- Involved and non-involved customers

### **Positive feedback received**

- Participants frequently highlighted positive experiences that were linked to when an applicant establishes contact with a named staff member.
- Participants also frequently praised the service received from individual members of staff within respective organisations who frequently made their best efforts to provide high quality services. However, this was generally not considered to extend across the organisation and the level of service received was very contingent upon the particular staff member that access was given to. This was a common experience reported across all of the landlord organisations that operate within the Halton area.
- Participants highlighted that once a property was to be offered, the process of being allocated a property would occur very quickly.
- Generally speaking, the range of information supplied to new tenants was considered to be a positive feature, although some participants highlighted how further improvements could be achieved here, such as looking to the private sector and the packs issued to new tenants/owners by organisations such as Barratt Homes. This included information on items such as boiler use and servicing arrangements, warranties, and clearly presented information about who to contact with particular issues. The presentation style of the information was also considered to be superior to that used by housing associations.

### **Negative feedback received**

- Participants frequently highlighted that there was a lack of clarity on where to go to access housing.
- Participants also reported a system that was cumbersome and complicated. It required applicants to approach each landlord separately, and be very proactive. It was felt by many that a single point of access and single application form issued to all providers may simplify the process considerably.
- Those tenants that had experienced homelessness were in particular concerned with the tight definitions applied in this area. In particular, the term “at risk” is considered misleading and wrong as many homeless persons are at risk but do not receive support.
- Improved communication for availability of emergency homeless accommodation is required.
- Restrictions on age are felt to be wrong. Limiting availability of both housing and support to those in the 16-25 age group categories is considered by many to be unfair.

### **What would customers like from the service**

- Improved approach to customer focus from staff
- Increased training for staff on both customer service and housing options advice
- A need to keep the applicant informed at all times about their housing application status
- A requirement to allow increased flexibility in the system, not always focussing upon turnaround times at the expense of the needs of the customer who may need some additional time or support. Some customers highlighted that just one to two weeks flexibility would make a real difference to their overall experience and allow for preparations for a house move to be made.
- Use of void enhancement budgets (or similar) is also desirable for use when appropriate if it will assist an individual to take up a tenancy.
- A broad range of customer / tenant information packs issued at sign-up should be maintained where these are already in place, and enhanced through looking to the private sector
- The establishment of a housing options advice line for the borough that is widely publicised in prominent public locations throughout the borough.
- Multi-agency approach in which a broad range of bodies are informed to provide sufficient advice, guidance and signposting on housing options available. This could include working with schools, careers services, Jobcentre, Social Services; etc. to supply information and guidance on housing options.
- Information on housing options widely published across a broad range of agencies, in accessible formats, and includes the criteria that is used to prioritise housing applications to promote transparency
- Consistency in the priority systems used by landlords across the borough.
- The introduction of a single application form to streamline access into the system.
- A single named contact person to improve communications and assist with maintaining a dialogue over progress with applications for housing.

## **Actions identified**

1. Improve questions on the new home survey so we are able to monitor satisfaction of the waiting list process, allocation process and the sign up process. Satisfaction to be monitored across all strands of diversity to see whether particular groups are more/less satisfied with the overall process of applying for housing, and accepting tenancies.
2. Make better use of the tenant profiling information to tailor the service area to the diversities and particular needs of the tenants.
3. Work with the eight local authorities in which CHA has stock to establish local offers for CHA tenants as part of the Tenant Services Authority new regulatory framework.
4. Work with West Lancashire Borough Council on the implementation of choice based lettings in their local authority area. This will then mean that the Association offers choice based lettings in all areas in which it has stock.
5. Work with all local authorities on the implementation of sub-regional choice based lettings and ensure that CHA responds to all changes arising from the move to sub-regional schemes.
6. Promote applying on line for choice based letting schemes where this facility is available, and look at different methods for promotion that meet that varying needs of prospective and current tenants.
7. CHA to consider the option of having dedicated internet facilities for tenants to use to bid for properties – i.e. internet booth in Head Office reception.

## **Outcomes for customers**

The actions identified will be used to shape changes to the allocations service and they will contribute to a number of outcomes for the Association's tenants.

- Greater satisfaction with services received.
- More accessibility and option on how to bid/apply for properties.
- Greater use of tenant profile information which will allow staff to ensure they are capturing any potential underlying issues and providing support to them.
- Services tailored to meet the diversities and particular needs of prospective and current tenants.
- Local offers established which meet the needs of tenants and empowering tenants to influence and review the services delivered by the Association.
- Choice based lettings available in all local authority areas in which the Association has stock.

## **Conclusion**

This assessment has enabled Cosmopolitan Housing Association to look closer at its Allocations Policy and identify the areas which affect its tenants. The implementation of the actions identified as a result of this assessment will make the improve the service making it more accessible to all.

The actions identified in this assessment will be incorporated into a wider service improvement plan to ensure that they are delivered, and link into the wider work that the organisation undertakes.