

CBL Officer Observations

During the twelve months of the operation of the Homeseeker Plus CBL process (an system) the team manager has been hold fortnightly `communication cells`. These give officers the opportunity to post CBL observations on notice board and share their experiences. These sessions take up just a few minutes of officer time but have been invaluable in ensuring that all officers get the most out of the system, to the benefit of the customer.

Many officer observations were in relation to technical, internal process or legislative issues, which are not included here. The following officer observations are therefore some of those that relate to the customer experience and tell a powerful story in relation to the success of the new approach.

Observations October 2016 to September 2017:

Electronic facilities:

- We are able to offer customers improved electronic means of notifying us of changes which has made our processes much more efficient.
- There were a number of understandable concerns initially that elderly or vulnerable clients would not be able to operate the system, but as mentioned previously, the ethos of the automated system was to allow the majority of customers to self-serve, freeing up officer time to deal with this particular client group who were unable to use the system. Officers now have the time and capacity to ensure that they are aware of individuals needs and they can also instigate the 'auto bid' for the customer; allowing the system to allocate, where applicable, a property which would be suitable for someone who was unable to bid for themselves.
- We are now able to track individual applicant's bidding activities and, for example, where applicants never bid on any property they are contacted and then supported if they need assistance or removed from the register if the reason for their inactivity is a result of them no longer being in housing need.
- The customer can bid from their own home; WODC terminals across the District (which have been installed as part of the roll-out of Universal Credit); over the phone; by text; or with assistance from the Service's existing Client Support Officers (who can take 4G Laptops out to Applicant's homes if and when required).

Transparency:

- One of the main advantages of operating the Choice Base Lettings System was for us to show all of the properties that were available to residents each week in the most transparent way possible.
- The system is such that it now provides a substantially higher level of transparency than was available in the previous method of allocating properties across the district. Customers previously refused properties as they were waiting for 'something better' to be offered the following week, but now customers can see that a particular street in Witney (for example) has a property available once a year and this ensures that they are more realistic in their choice of location within the district.

- Applicants can make good choices based on their current and future needs, as they see the whole range of properties. As the Choice Base Lettings system offers applicants a comprehensive picture of their options it can inform them to adjust their preference area choices; giving them a much better chance of securing a home.
- The system allows residents to view all properties that are available across the district on a weekly basis. It allows residents to put in a choice for a property that they would wish to live in (called a 'bid'), rather than us allocating a property to them.
- Choice Base Lettings has transformed the letting of social housing from a producer-driven function to a consumer-led service. This is strongly in line with government principles of freedom and consumer choice.
- Those that are over-accommodated but not on the transfer list can now see what is available and may therefore be more likely to take an interest in transferring. This has led to the release of much needed family accommodation and this has lessened the financial burden on those customers who were currently significantly over-accommodated (after family members have moved out of the property).
- All of the information that the Choice Base Lettings System adheres to is within the Allocations Policy and the customer is able to digest this information prior to applying to be on the Homeseeker Register. This ensures that we do not unnecessarily raise people's expectations.
- As applicants can see pictures and detailed descriptions on-line they can quickly disregard properties that they may otherwise have been led into the allocation process upon. A good example of this is where applicants with disability access requirements are allocated to a property because the description is 'bungalow'. With DNS, applicants can see that, actually, this particular property is a bungalow but has unsuitable steps up to the front door.

Simplicity:

- It simplifies the criteria and is easier for customers to follow, presenting a straightforward grid of criteria for each band. The detail behind each can be adjusted as necessary; for example the definitions of "significant medical need" and "urgent medical need" (and the relationship between those two phrases) can be altered in the detail of the Policy. However, the criteria/the grid stays the same; providing a sense of simplicity and consistency.
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