



Chartered
Institute of
Housing



A guide to choice-based lettings

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Introduction

Choice-based lettings (CBL) is a different approach to allocations that is designed to place choice at the heart of lettings systems. Applicants in traditional direct lettings systems can exercise a degree of choice by refusing offers of accommodation for normal lettings, which can create a longer turnaround of voids. The critical shortage of housing stock means it is vital that housing organisations reduce refusal rates to minimise the length of time that properties are empty, and increase transparency around their stock.

Normally under CBL a vacant property is advertised and applicants make bids to register their interest. At the end of the bidding process, the applicant who has the highest priority under the allocations policy is allocated the property. CBL puts the onus on applicants to seek out suitable properties – rather than the landlord targeting potential tenants – and in doing so encourages and rewards pro-active engagement, while vulnerable households are supported in the process.

The benefits of CBL can include greater customer choice, more transparency, increased engagement and interaction between housing providers and customers, better management of customers' expectations, tackling low demand properties/areas, better acceptance rates and more sustainable neighbourhoods. CBL also offers the potential for significant efficiencies – saving time and money.

However CBL can also raise unrealistic expectations in high demand areas, introduce inefficiencies in low demand areas, bring added complexity in dealing with multiple organisations, create poorer outcomes for vulnerable households, and facilitate inappropriate allocations to specialist properties. It is therefore important to undertake good practice in CBL to avoid these and other adverse outcomes that go against the aims of the approach.



What the guide aims to do and who will find it useful

This guide provides a brief overview of good practice in CBL, illustrated with examples from Ireland and the UK. It is primarily aimed at practitioners in the Republic of Ireland, but its universal principles can be applied by practitioners working in other countries – it therefore uses generic terminology (e.g. housing organisations, housing associations, customers etc.). It refers to the CBL service to emphasise the customer-centred approach in contrast to traditional allocations systems.

The guide is not designed to be a comprehensive outline of the CBL service, but to give practitioners an understanding of the framework in which their policy should operate. It is important to note that the principles outlined are general in nature, and you will need to adhere to the legislative context applicable to you. For example, the guide mentions CBL services which operate across local authority boundaries or are managed by external agencies – these are not currently part of the Department of Housing's framing of CBL in Ireland. Providers in Ireland should also refer to the departmental guidance on CBL.

This guide explores some of the challenges faced by providers in implementing CBL services and highlights examples of how organisations have successfully developed them and achieved their aims. It will be useful for:

- those working in the housing sector who want to improve their lettings and tenancy sustainment through CBL
- housing association staff who tailor their services to the CBL policy of local authorities they work with or maintain common waiting lists, and
- local authority housing professionals in Ireland who are required to establish a CBL service under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness¹.



1 <http://bit.ly/29LoZFb>

What is choice-based lettings (CBL)?

CBL is an alternative approach to traditional allocation processes, which was developed in the Dutch city of Delft in the late 1980s. There is no universal definition of CBL in the modern context, since one benefit of the approach is its ability to be localised and services will therefore vary between providers. However, CBL services that have the elements of the so-called 'Delft model', as originally developed in the Netherlands, have demonstrated stronger outcomes. These elements are as follows:

- vacant properties are advertised on a periodic (e.g. fortnightly) basis
- information on who is eligible to apply for individual properties is included in advertisements
- an applicant's priority is decided in line with easily understood concepts like age, waiting time or length of residence (such concepts feature under allocations schemes, subject to legislative frameworks and local approaches)
- the onus is on applicants to seek out suitable properties – rather than the landlord targeting potential tenants
- applicants apply for specific advertised properties, and their circumstances are verified against the landlord's published eligibility criteria
- the landlord ranks applicants for a specific vacancy to determine the highest priority applicant who is then offered the property

- the outcome of the process is published to show the level of demand for the property and the priority of the successful applicant
- personal support is available for applicants who require assistance to use the service, and
- a small number of vacant properties are set aside for people with emergency need.

Landlords also need to adhere to any legislative or regulatory requirements relating to CBL. Applicable to local authorities in Ireland at September 2017, the relevant regulations²:

- require housing authorities to send the following information to households when a CBL service is first introduced in the area:
 - » an explanation of CBL including that the housing authority will make a fresh determination of the household's qualification for social housing at allocation stage
 - » that households have three weeks to apply for advertised properties and provide any requested information
 - » that households which refuse a reasonable offer will not be entitled to apply for another CBL property with any housing authority for one year from the date of refusal

2 Social Housing Allocation Regulations (S.I. No. 198 of 2011) as amended by Social Housing Allocation (Amendment) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 503 of 2016)

- allow a housing authority to apply CBL to any of its properties that it expects to allocate within six months
- require housing authorities to determine applicants' eligibility conditions for a property, having regard to neighbourhood sustainability issues but only considering allocating to:
 - » household types whose needs/ requirements would be met by the property, and
 - » households which have applied and provided any required supporting information before the closing date
- require a housing authority to publish details about an available CBL property on the internet, and to make the notice available in its offices during normal working hours and other places the housing authority considers appropriate. The housing authority can also take other publicity measures. The notice must contain:
 - » the location, category and any other relevant particulars of the property
 - » the household type(s) eligible to apply
 - » information on alternative places the notice has been published and when it can be accessed there if applicable
 - » that the housing authority will make a fresh determination of the household's qualification for social housing at allocation stage
- » the publication date of the notice and closing date for receipt of applications and any supporting information required
- » the housing authority's contact details for further information about the property or service
- allow a housing authority to subsequently restrict allocations to the area of choice in which the property is situated, where the original advertisement did not apply any such restriction
- allow a housing authority to discontinue with CBL in respect of a property at any time prior to allocation
- state that households which refuse a reasonable offer will not be entitled to apply for another CBL property with any housing authority for one year from the date of refusal:
 - » a reasonable offer is one that meets a household's accommodation needs/ requirements in the local authority's opinion and is irrespective of area of choice
 - » this refusal does not count towards the two refusals of reasonable offers provision under traditional allocation schemes
- require a housing authority to determine an applicant's priority in accordance with the order of priority set out in its allocation scheme.



Why is it important to get CBL right?

Not getting CBL right can lead to adverse outcomes that go against the aims of the approach. A CBL service should be well established and resourced to achieve the best outcomes in relation to the following aims:



Choice.

An overly prescriptive approach to the CBL service or waiting list/allocations policy can undermine the principle of choice. For example eligibility criteria facilitate best use of stock, promote housing providers' aims and meet legislative requirements, but they should not be overly prescriptive so as to erect barriers for applicants and undermine the principle of choice.



Scope of choice.

A CBL service with a wide scope that operates across local authority boundaries, and between local authorities, housing associations and private landlords can make better use of housing stock. However this approach brings added complexity that comes with working across multiple organisations which needs to be managed effectively.



Accessibility.

Making rational choices depends on information – the information necessary for applicants to participate effectively in the CBL service should be as accessible as possible. Vulnerable households can misunderstand CBL and experience fewer favourable outcomes. The CBL service must facilitate access for groups with specific disadvantages, including people who are digitally excluded where online schemes are in use.



Simplicity and transparency.

The whole service should be as simple and straight forward as practicable. It should be transparent to educate and inform customers' choices. Unrealistic expectations can be raised in the absence of market information, leading to inefficiencies.

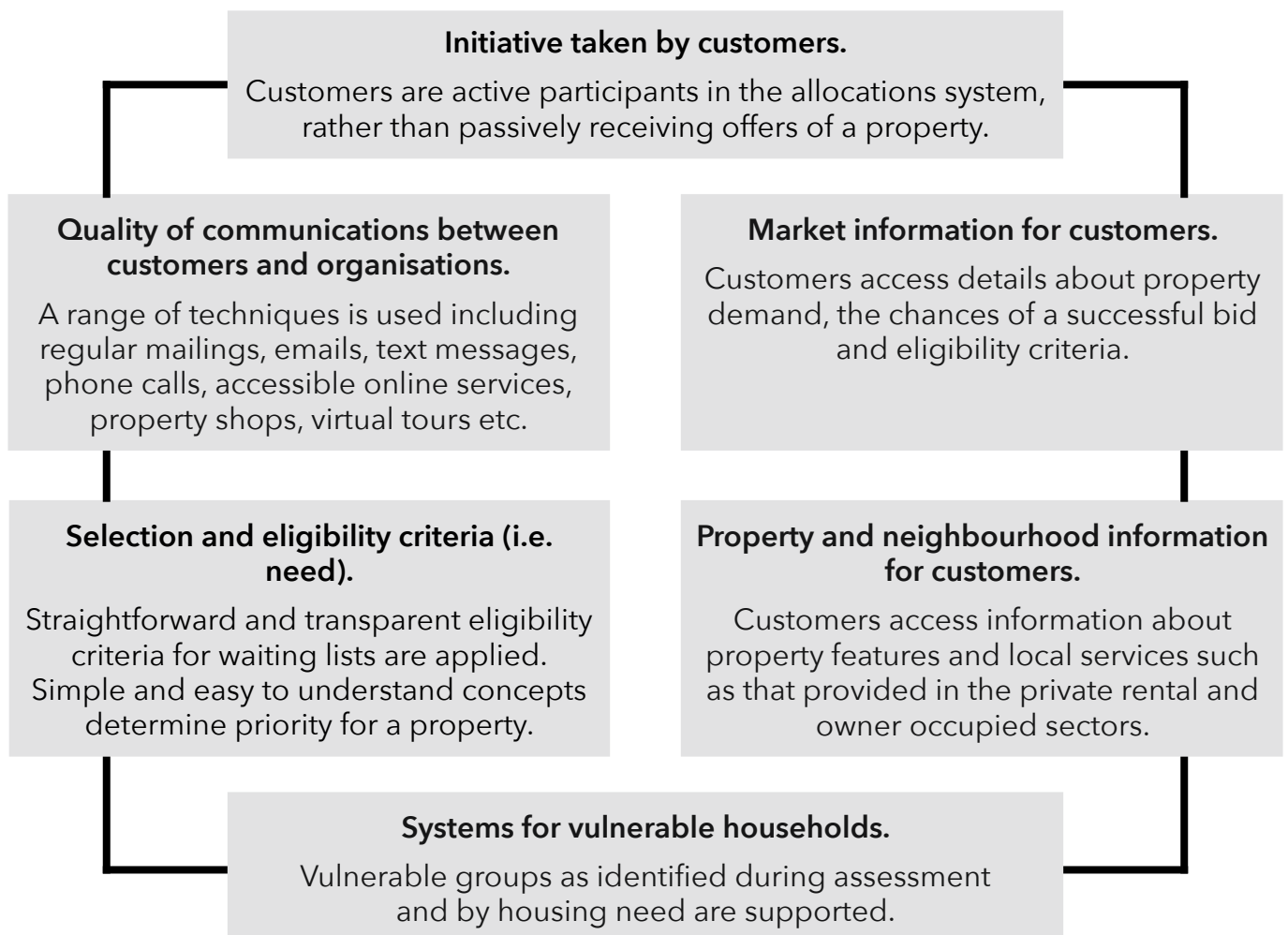


Flexibility.

A CBL service that is flexible and has regard to local circumstances and contexts can deal with particular problem estates, hard to let properties and other local priorities.

What are the elements of an effective CBL service?

CBL services vary greatly across housing providers in Ireland and the UK regarding policies and processes, but generally speaking they all adhere to the following six common principles.



To be effective, the CBL service needs to adhere to these principles. Communication with customers is vital – providing market information and details about the service has been shown to help manage expectations, particularly where there is a lack of supply. Customer expectations may still exceed what can be delivered, but this could be an issue of supply rather than allocation. Participating organisations will need to manage change effectively to help build support for the service among customers, staff and stakeholders.

Give careful consideration to all processes, from identifying the issues that you want the CBL service to address, right through to enhancing the service post-review. Progress will be influenced by the following eight factors, which incorporate the six common principles outlined above.

1. Identify issues and decide what you want to achieve with CBL.

Clearly identify your organisation's aim in developing CBL as an important first step, with aims prioritised when there is more than one.

The common aims of CBL services are:



Promoting greater customer choice.

One of the obvious aims of introducing a CBL service is to offer greater customer choice. CBL can persuade people to move to locations they have not previously thought about, once they access information about property demand in different areas.



Improving information.

Data on the demand of properties and areas can help providers to take informed decisions, and improve information provision for customers and therefore quality engagement.



Managerial efficiency.

CBL can help to reduce the number of voids including by tackling 'hard to let' properties and minimising re-let times, saving providers time and money, including through reduced administration costs.



Tackling low demand.

A CBL service can increase interest in social housing among new groups of eligible customers who haven't previously considered the tenure. This is useful for providers who have low levels of demand in their areas.

Develop objectives and targets for monitoring and evaluation. First you must know key metrics of your existing allocations system. Process map/measure the system to provide a baseline for monitoring the impact of the CBL service. Workflow processes are vital, especially if the service is online.

Monitoring provides valuable market information for providers on the demand for their properties/areas. It also provides the information necessary to evaluate the performance of the service, and to review and enhance its operation over time. It can highlight any groups that are not participating in the service, and help to identify the reasons and inform subsequent actions.

Ensure your information and communications technology (ICT) systems can produce the information required to measure your targets (and report appropriately to your governance structures and partners). Things to monitor for a CBL service can include:

- number of expressions of interest for a property
- number of views of a property for online notices
- login rates for online services

- percentage of invalid bids made
- percentage of “ineffective bidders” who withdraw their bids from properties
- percentage of void properties
- average re-let time
- percentage of properties successfully let after one offer, and
- participation rates and successful lets for vulnerable households.

Recognise what is practicable for CBL to achieve alone and what it can achieve by working with other services. If your aim is to improve managerial efficiency, an objective might be to reduce voids with a target to reduce the percentage of voids by a particular date. You must recognise that you will need to have effective void management processes in place as well to work towards this aim. A pre-condition for an efficient CBL service is a robust and effective repairs and maintenance service that can deliver works to a pre-agreed standard in minimum time.

Case study - Cork City Council

Before Cork’s CBL service was introduced, refusal rates were high generally. The main reason for a refusal was that the property offered was not in the customer’s preferred location, even though the offer was in the area of choice. The main reasons for customers contacting allocations were to find out when a property would be offered, and to request to be considered for a particular property. It was clear that customers wanted a say in where they lived and to be informed about wait times.

Cork also maintained 30 areas of choice, in order to reflect the different geographic spread of the city. But this meant applicants who chose their maximum three areas permitted by legislation were limited to ten per cent of the number of areas across the city.

Rather than Cork trying to get the ‘fit’ right,

it wanted to let the customers decide if they were interested in a particular property. Cork introduced an online CBL service applicable to the whole council area, which reduced the refusal rate from an average of 40 per cent to an average of 15 per cent over one year, and reduced the time taken to re-let a property that is ready for letting to the start of the tenancy from an average of 15 weeks to five weeks.

The service was introduced with the following objectives:

Aim	Objective
Promote greater customer choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a total of three areas of choice overall to expand available choice
Managerial efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achieve a ‘better’ fit and thereby reduce refusal rates • reduce the time taken to let properties that were ready
Improve Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve transparency around supply to help inform applicants about supply/demand and therefore manage expectations • utilise applicant engagement in a better way



2. Get your supporting policies and procedures right.

Have an effective void management process, incorporating a robust and effectual repairs and maintenance service. This is a pre-condition for an efficient CBL service. For more information on ways to ensure this, read CIH's guide to [effective void management in Ireland](#).

Waiting lists/allocations policies determine the priority of applicants and hence successful bidders under the CBL service, so they are some of the most important supporting policies.



Ensure your waiting list/allocations policies are...

Simple.

Priority determination within waiting lists should use easy to understand concepts in line with those of the Delft model such as age, waiting time, length of residence etc. Consider banded systems over points-based ones for determining priority. In banded systems, applicants are placed in a 'band' based on their circumstances, with each band reflecting a different level of housing need. Banded systems are often simpler, more transparent and more easily understood, and therefore have greater compatibility with CBL services. A banded system can also offer better data on waiting times, since applicants are usually allocated in date order from within bands. Applicants who joined the list earlier are housed first, which avoids the 'queue jumping' of some points-based systems thereby helping to also manage applicants' expectations.

Accurate.

Regularly review the waiting list to help ensure that only people who want social housing remain on the list, helping to better keep track of demand.

Flexible.

Make sure CBL can be used to address local issues within defined areas or schemes, such as low-demand properties, anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood sustainability. CBL can be used to achieve desirable housing management outcomes as well as making best use of local stock.

Choice maximising.

If existing areas of choice limit applicants to a proportion of your stock when they select the maximum permitted areas, ensure there are sound business and geographical reasons for this which contribute to the aims of your organisation. Otherwise, consider expanding areas of choice to cover more or all of your housing stock. Remember that applicants self-select properties under CBL and experience shows that they will consider options outside traditionally selected areas of choice once they access market information about properties/areas.

Make sure eligibility criteria for properties are not too exclusive. Such criteria facilitate best use of stock, promote housing providers' aims and meet legislative requirements, but they should not be overly prescriptive so as to erect barriers for applicants and undermine the principle the choice.

Making sure that your supporting selection policies observe these principles can help your CBL service to be seen as fair and transparent by your customers.

3. Undertake staff training and development.

Give early consideration to skillsets. Introducing a CBL service will involve reorganising staff and responsibilities within your organisation. It may involve training existing employees, appointing new ones, secondment and/or engaging consultants. Developing and managing the service requires a range of skills that goes beyond traditional allocations systems, for example:

- change management
- business strategy
- ICT
- marketing
- procurement
- project management
- project planning
- stakeholder engagement
- stakeholder management, and
- strategic communications.

Tasks at various phases of the service that draw on these skills may include:

- business planning
- developing and maintaining partnerships
- procuring front and back end ICT infrastructure
- testing and modifying processes/ procedures with involvement of customers and vulnerable groups
- marketing the service

- managing the service and staff effectively, and
- evaluating and reviewing the service.

Build staff training into project management processes. Training staff is important for everyone directly and indirectly involved in the CBL service. It should be an on-going process covering everything from general overviews of the service to specific training e.g. ICT systems.

Case study - Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

NIHE has piloted CBL in a small number of designated difficult-to-let locations specifically to reduce refusal rates and improve re-let times in these areas. Properties are advertised publicly on a weekly cycle through the internet, inviting anyone who is registered on the waiting list to make a bid which can be registered online, on the phone or in person. Once the closing date for bids passes, the rules of the housing selection scheme - which facilitates assessment, common waiting list registration and allocation - are used to allocate from the list of applicants who have registered an interest in the property.

Before the CBL pilot was introduced, NIHE carried out extensive consultation with relevant staff to enable them to inform the policy and procedures for the pilot. Advice notes were issued to frontline housing staff, outlining detailed procedures to be followed for the designated CBL areas. Forums with presentations were organised to facilitate communication around the pilot and ongoing evaluation to inform its later phases. Additional support for frontline staff is provided by the housing policy unit.

4. Consult and involve the right people

Consult continuously and extensively on CBL processes/procedures and supporting policies to help your service succeed. Consulting key stakeholders (including customers) in the development of CBL will help you build a service in which local people have confidence, as well as a service that meets local needs. To consult effectively you will need to allocate adequate resources, build consultation timeframes into the development process and use consultative methods that maximise participation.

Involve external and internal stakeholders. Consult all housing, homelessness, ICT and human resources staff who will be impacted by the development and implementation of the CBL service and its associated tasks. Consult both existing tenants, and households on the waiting list. Involve people such as local government councillors, board members of housing associations, the regulator, members of advisory/consultative bodies, specific needs groups, relevant tenants' organisations and community and voluntary bodies including those representing minority ethnic groups.

Get your partnership working right. Consulting continuously with external stakeholders is likely to result in successful partnership working, which is vital for a CBL service that operates across providers/tenures. Such a service can make better use of housing stock, however a joint approach brings added complexity that comes with working across multiple organisations. This needs to be managed effectively. It is important that CBL managers are responsive to the needs of partner organisations, and take a flexible approach in supporting them to achieve their aims, so that all parties' expectations are met. Establish suitable governance arrangements early on and

consider forming a steering group of decision makers from across the partnership, as well as a stakeholder advisory group. These new structures can be linked with existing ones.

Where multiple allocations policies are used, ensure that your CBL service suggests the most relevant housing option without taking away choice and transparency – this is also important when different tenures are being advertised. Also make sure that multi-agency CBL services facilitate tenants moving for work or family reasons, and make these moves as easy and desirable as practicable.

Partnership working is also important in relation to a CBL service that is delivered by an external agency, and when you are developing systems to support vulnerable households. In the case of the latter, a good place to start is creating a local agreement on the principles of the system between the local authority, housing associations, and other relevant organisations such as health agencies, social services, tenants' organisations and community and voluntary bodies. The agreement would cover meeting local needs as well as the legislative and regulatory requirements.

Case study - Cork City Council

Cork conducted an online survey for one week during 2016, asking applicants for their views on the CBL website. Applicants said they wanted more internal photographs to 'get a feel' for properties, as well as more information on parking availability and property building energy ratings. Some responses also showed that information about housing supply needed to be provided – for example, that supply is dependent on properties being vacated and on funding.

Such feedback has helped to inform the ongoing development of the website.

Cork is currently implementing a second phase of their CBL service to include housing association properties. Cork worked with a focus group involving three housing associations, in order to deliver a design for incorporating their vacancies on the CBL website.

Cork subsequently amended the website with the changes, and it plans to issue a circular letter to the remaining housing associations with the relevant information and steps required to advertise their properties.

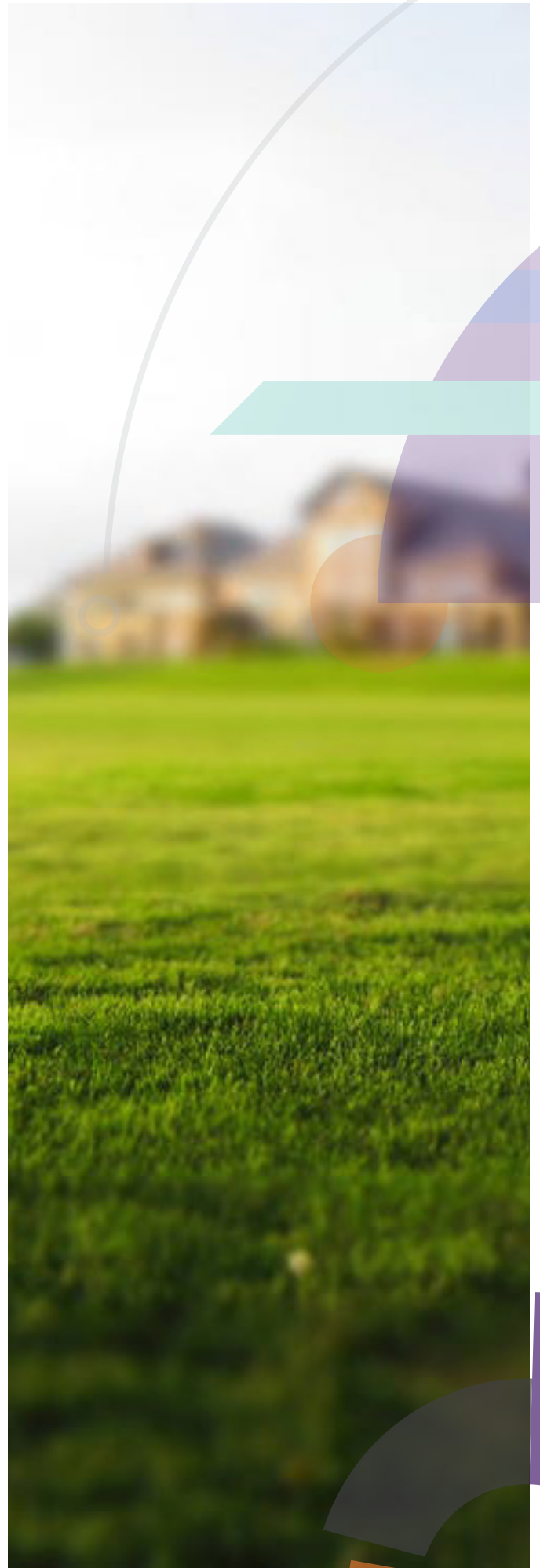
Each housing association will receive a username and password to gain read only access to the website.

Case study - Midland Heart

Midland Heart, a Birmingham-based housing association, launched a stand-alone CBL service in 2012 called 'Homes Direct'. Local authority partners subsequently joined the service due to Homes Direct being web-based, easy to use and understand, a cost-effective alternative to managing the councils' own in-house services, able to handle multiple allocations policies and advertise/let different tenures, and able to quickly react to policy changes.

Midland Heart now has 12 housing association and six local authority partners - five councils use Homes Direct as their only housing register/CBL service and one uses it for mutual exchanges. One of the partners, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, has had regular input into developing and improving the service and they have found high satisfaction levels through annual surveys of their customers and partners.

Midland Heart has found that communicating with staff and customers at every stage of development, and engaging with them in testing and delivery have both been vital to the success of the service.



5. Use an ICT product that meets your aims.

Consider the different ICT solutions available. ICT is a powerful tool in delivering a CBL service – organisations can add CBL modules to existing ICT systems, or procure a new product that is standardised or customised to meet their aims. In the case of the latter, consider the extent of the compatibility of the product with existing systems. Ensure adequate time and resources are allocated initially for any procurement and testing, and on an on-going basis for modification and upgrading.

Take full advantage of how CBL can use ICT. It is important that CBL makes best use of front end software (user interfaces such as website pages) as well as back end (data access/storage). An integrated solution can, at the front end:

- provide an easy to use and understand CBL interface that is also mobile friendly
- facilitate waiting list registration through simple form entry
- generate standardised and simple adverts, drawing on property and neighbourhood data
- incorporate video tours in adverts
- allow online bidding, and
- display the published outcome of the bidding process.

Back end ICT can:

- run your waiting list(s) including processing new registrations
- handle multiple allocations policies and incorporate changes

- check applicants' eligibility
- check the validity of bids and remove duplicates where applicants have expressed interest through more than one method
- generate correspondence to applicants e.g. providing bid summaries with market information or advising of ineligibility
- rank applicants' priority against waiting list criteria to determine the successful applicant, and
- show you demand levels for areas and property types, which can inform planning for housing supply.

Case study – South Dublin County Council

SDCC introduced a CBL service that is completely online, and the website is designed to be mobile-friendly and easy to use. Prospective tenants receive a pin number and can register their interest for any advertised properties. The service covers local authority, housing association and leased homes. The periodic cycle is weekly.

SDCC directs applicants to their local library if they need internet access and computer facilities. Support for people experiencing difficulties is provided via telephone, and staff members in the council's customer care centres.

6. Develop the CBL service with clear processes and procedures.

Consider the nature of your CBL service. There is no correct way to develop CBL, and your approach will depend on things like your organisation's aims, the profile of your customers and housing stock, demographics and internet usage statistics in your areas, and the capacity of your organisation to deliver a service.

A fully online service with complementary and/or assisted bidding methods for vulnerable households is commensurate with the CBL principles. An online service can help you achieve value for money objectives, while addressing capacity issues. This approach could be used by, for example, an organisation whose customers and potential customers have low but rapidly increasing levels of internet usage. However, another organisation that faces similarly low levels of usage, but also a persistent lack of digital infrastructure in their locality might place a greater emphasis on offline bidding methods.

CBL can cover all of your stock, or you could pilot a service that covers one area or property type and/or targets a specific issue such as hard-to-let properties. Small-scale schemes can be monitored and evaluated to inform strategic decisions on rolling it out more widely at a later stage. You will need to think about whether the CBL service is better as a radical, evolutionary or targeted change to meet your organisation's aims. Consider whether you will deliver the service in-house, or whether it will be delivered by a new or existing external agency.

Consider detailed procedures. While a CBL service should be developed to have regard to local circumstances and contexts, there are a number of detailed procedures to consider which are developed from the elements of the Delft model:

Advertising

Advertise vacant properties on a periodic (e.g. fortnightly) cycle online, in free or local newspapers, regular mailings, property shops or other media.

Note that the decided length for the periodic cycle will have implications for your costs, information flow and re-let times.

Labelling

- Label the vacant unit with relevant information about the property and neighbourhood, such as:
- location, property type, size, room layout, contents, property condition, rent and service charges, access issues, gardens and parking
- any special requirements including age restrictions or pets, and
- local services and amenities like schools, shops, public transport and health services.
- List the closing date and any other statutorily required information.
- State when applicants will hear from you.
- Clearly explain dates for occupation and available grants for furniture/ decorating allowances.
- List all eligibility conditions including any transfer criteria.
- Explain how priority will be determined using easily understood concepts.

List any general requirements that apply to tenants, such as around affordability checks, vetting, interviews, police checks etc.

Listings can carry a lot of information – much of it can be summarised and provided alongside symbols in a way that is easily understood and meaningful.

The aim is to facilitate both suitable and eligible applicants pursuing a property that they would choose to live in, avoiding delays in occupation.

Application

The applicant applies for the advertised property by bidding online, or by sending in responses by text message, email, post, telephone including interactive voice response systems etc. depending on resources and local circumstances.

The application, which includes any required supporting information, is made before the closing date.

Verification

Verify eligibility of all applicants against your published criteria, and contact any bidders who are ineligible to explain why.

Check the validity of responses paying particular attention to common mistakes. Make contact with applicants who appear to be struggling with the service to provide support.

Selection

After the closing date rank all eligible applicants to determine the highest priority applicant in line with the allocation scheme, which should use easily understood concepts.

Offer

Check the highest priority applicant's eligibility, interview the applicant, carry out any applicable checks and an accompanied viewing of the property, and offer the property to the successful applicant.

If the successful applicant is found to be ineligible or refuses the offer, then repeat the process for the second highest priority applicant.

Publication

Publish the outcome of the process to show the number of bids for the property, bidders' priority levels against that of the successful applicant, and any key factor that would have improved bidders' chances of a successful bid e.g. time spent on waiting list. This will help to inform applicants about the demand for properties/estates and to manage expectations.

It is good practice to let all applicants know whether or not they were successful in a bid, but this will have capacity implications – an appropriate ICT solution could assist in this regard. If only the successful applicant will be proactively contacted, make this clear on the advert.

Maximise publicity.

Consider publicising the scheme through a wide range of media such as regular mailings, local media, online, during relevant customer contact, and via roadshows and information sessions including with community and voluntary bodies.

Case study - Wakefield and District Housing (WDH)

WDH has launched an 'immediate available homes' campaign – all properties which have proven difficult to let through the choice-based letting scheme are advertised on the 'immediately available homes' list and can usually be let within two to three days.

7. Ensure equality of access for vulnerable households.

It is a core principle of CBL that measures and systems are used to support vulnerable households. Such households will require support measures varying from assistance in accessing the system to direct lettings in exceptional circumstances.

One way to monitor participation is through the use of an 'assisted list', where the provider establishes a list of applicants who are identified to require assistance to participate fully in the service. Such applicants could be identified through surveys of people who have not been engaging with the provider's CBL service, to determine whether advice or support is required.

Maximise access to online CBL services.

Most modern CBL services are online with a majority of bids made on the internet. This approach has clear value for money benefits, but it can represent a participation barrier for groups with specific disadvantages such as learning difficulties, poor literacy, poor health, poor IT skills and limited opportunities to access the internet.

Ensure that the online CBL service adheres to relevant guidelines for people with sight loss and visual impairments i.e. the Irish application software accessibility guidelines, or the Royal National Institute for the Blind's 'see it right' guidelines. Consider using features such as Browsealoud for these households and others who require reading support. These measures can also help you comply with the Disability Act 2005 (Ireland), Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Northern Ireland) or Equality Act 2010 (Britain).

Provide the service in a range of languages. In relevant public service offices, make the

service available on terminals and advertise it on notice boards. Such offices could include those of councils, housing, libraries, Intreo and Citizens Information Centres (Ireland) or Jobs & Benefits and Citizens Advice Bureaux (UK), health agencies/surgeries and community and voluntary bodies.

Assist applicants to access online CBL services.

Identify vulnerable households on the waiting list, and send advertisements of vacant properties by alternative means if required. Consider reminding applicants to bid for properties by email, text or phone – some applicants (not just vulnerable households) may misunderstand the service or how their priority is determined. Consider automatic bidding from which applicants have to opt out rather than bidding on individual properties.

Normally waiting lists will give priority to vulnerable households either through a priority/urgent band or via points allocation. If this is not the case, consider granting vulnerable households priority status that will make them top ranked while bidding for CBL properties. Another option is granting a single use priority card that vulnerable households can use to secure a property.

Use complementary options to online bidding such as text message, email, free phone call and paper application.

Facilitate designated people applying on behalf of applicants by proxy bid. Trained officers in relevant public service offices can assist people to bid for properties, in addition to your own organisation's staff.

Maintain a direct lettings alternative.

It is normal to continue with some direct lets under a CBL service. It will be necessary to maintain direct lettings in cases such as when applicants who you have a statutory duty to house have not been bidding, such as full duty applicants in the case of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Properties usually excluded from CBL are specially adapted properties for physical disabilities, housing for older people and some units for certain household circumstances. Other examples are for reasons of housing management and cases involving hospital discharge and public protection. You could also consider setting aside properties for allocation to Housing First service users in your area.



8. Evaluate and review.

With effective monitoring systems in place, regularly review the service to ensure it remains fit for purpose and achieves your aims. Determine areas for improvement, and consider using specialist housing service providers/consultants to benchmark your performance against high-performing housing organisations. Carry out regular surveys of customers and partners to gauge satisfaction levels and facilitate their input. If the aims of your organisation change, then your CBL service may also need to evolve to reflect this change.



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