

**[ Draft ] Bid to the ODPM's Choice Based Lettings Regional Fund  
by the  
Herts & Essex Housing Options Consortium**

**PART A – CORE INFORMATION**

**1. Lead Authority and Contact Name for Grant Funding**

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**2. Rationale and Background to the Formation of the Consortium**

All the partners of the Consortium operate within the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region (which comprises all the local authorities in Hertfordshire and five Essex authorities). The Sub-Regional Housing Group's latest Housing Strategy incorporates an Action Plan, within which there is a key action to explore the scope for collaborative working on Choice Based Lettings (CBL) within the Sub-Region. As a result, meetings have been held - and investigative surveys undertaken - across the Sub-Region over the past six months to explore this scope. As a result, and encouraged by the availability of the ODPM's funding, the Essex and Hertfordshire local authorities in the East of the Sub-Region have worked hard, within a short timescale, to form the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium, agree a common approach to the development of a Joint CBL Scheme, and formulate and submit this bid.

The Consortium shares the Government's view that such an approach will achieve the greatest choice and flexibility in meeting our applicants' housing needs, and that there are a number of benefits from larger, cross-local authority, schemes, which are articulated within this Bid. In particular, they enable greater regional mobility and help to break down artificial boundaries. For RSLs, they cut the costs of being involved in several different schemes.

**3. Partners of the Consortium and Bid**

The [six] local authority partners within the Consortium are listed below and comprise [all] of the local authorities in the eastern part of the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region (i.e on the Herts and Essex border), with the exception of Harlow DC, which has already introduced a CBL Scheme, [and XXXXXX who did not consider themselves to be sufficiently well advanced with their plans for the introduction of CBL to join the Consortium]. NB – LAs unable to achieve members' support to bid to be deleted]

Brentwood BC  
Broxbourne BC

Chelmsford BC  
East Herts DC

Epping Forest DC  
Uttlesford DC

The [no. TBA] RSL members of the Consortium listed below all currently have nomination arrangements with one or more of the local authority partners. It should be noted that two local authorities within the Consortium (East Herts and Chelmsford) have transferred the whole of their housing stock, and a third (Broxbourne) are currently at an advanced stage. The numbers in brackets refer to the number of local authority Consortium partners with whom the RSL has existing nomination arrangements and (\*) denotes a stock transfer RSL (or proposed) [ Others to b inserted once commitments received].

Aldwyck  
Estuary

Anglia (\*)  
Metropolitan

Broxbourne (\*)  
Pardigm

East Thames  
Sanctuary

The majority of RSL Partners within the Consortium already have extensive experience of operating CBLs and, altogether, currently operate schemes in [XX] other local authority areas, and are assisting with the introduction of new schemes in a further [XX] local authority areas.

#### **4. Regional and Sub-Regional Strategic Context**

One of the objectives of the Regional Housing Strategy for the East of England is to provide mixed communities and widen choice. The Strategy states that the Regional Housing Delivery Group will support the development of CBL through the sub-regions by providing information exchange on good practice and links to regional representative agencies for vulnerable groups.

The Sub-Regional Housing Strategy has an objective of achieving social inclusion, and to ensure access and choice to housing. Section 2 above refers to the inclusion of collaborative working on CBL within the Sub-Regional Strategy's Action Plan.

#### **5. Amount of Landlords' Stock to be Included Within the Scheme**

Each of the local authority landlords within the Consortium have committed to the provision of 100% of their stock to the Scheme, with the exception of some individual vacancies which, for various reasons, need to be taken out of the CBL process. The RSL Partners have committed to provide all of their stock in the Consortium's area to the Scheme. In the first instance, for a short trial period, each landlord may only allocate a proportion of vacancies to the Scheme, to test the Scheme's operation.

#### **6. Approval for the Scheme by Members, Support of Partners and Consultation with Statutory and Community Organisations**

It is confirmed that the appropriate elected members and/or committees of each of the Consortium's local authorities have given their full, formal, support to their council being both a member of the Consortium and to the Consortium's bid.

Furthermore, each of the RSL partners have been fully involved with the formation of the Consortium and the development and submission of this Bid, and have expressed their full commitment to the Bid, in writing.

In view of the limited timescales involved, and the size of the Consortium's area of operation, it has not been possible to consult with any other partner organisations in the production of the Bid. However, more importantly, should the Bid be successful, the Consortium will consult the following on the proposed *operation* of the Scheme, before implementation:

- All tenants, through existing Newsletter arrangements
- District-wide tenant and leaseholder federations/fora (where they exist)
- Councils for voluntary services
- Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Essex and Hertfordshire Supporting People Teams
- Parish and town councils

A Briefing Paper will be produced by the Consortium, explaining how CBL works and the proposals for the Scheme's operation, which will be sent (or in some cases a summary will be provided) to the above groups - together with any other groups that become aware of the process and express an interest in being provided with further information – and invited to provide any comments on the proposed approach.

Although there is not a significant BME population in any of the local authority areas, the Consortium will be contacting the Essex and Hertfordshire Race Equality Councils to discuss

issues relating to BME communities. It should be noted that there are no Tenant Management Organisations within the Consortium's area.

## **7. Sharing Good Practice**

If the Consortium's bid is successful, we recognise that not only will it be one of the first to receive funding from the ODPM's CBL Regional Fund, it will also be one of the first where a number of local authorities and RSLs within a housing sub-region have come together in a formal way to work collaboratively on CBL outside London and large metropolitan areas.

Therefore, the Consortium would be keen to share any good practice we develop with GO-East, the ODPM, other local authorities and RSLs – particularly those interested in bidding for funding in Round 2. The Consortium will also assist the Regional Housing Delivery Group with its information exchange on good practice, referred to in [Section 4](#) above.

## **PART B - THE CONSORTIUM'S COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO CHOICE BASED LETTINGS**

### **8. Key Objectives of the Consortium and Joint CBL Scheme**

The Consortium's key objectives for the CBL Scheme are as follows:

- To work collaboratively amongst local authority and RSL partners
- To jointly commission an existing CBL Agency to operate the Joint CBL scheme on behalf of all the partners
- To consult other partners and interested organisations on the operation of the Scheme
- To minimise the implementation and ongoing costs to partners and to maximise the opportunities for external funding, particularly from the ODPM
- To maximise the number of vacant properties that are let through the scheme
- To maximise accessibility and ease of operation for applicants
- To ensure that vulnerable and homeless people, and those who do not have English as their first language, are not excluded and are able to obtain full benefits from the Scheme
- To explore the opportunities for extending the Scheme to private sector landlords
- To share good practice on joint working with other local authorities and RSLs

### **9. Approach to the Operation of the Scheme – Use of an Existing CBL Agency**

Following the successful establishment of other joint approaches to the operation of CBL Schemes – mainly by the London boroughs - a number of "CBL Agencies" have been formed, usually by the local authorities involved. These CBL Agencies are now very experienced at managing the entire process, including producing, printing and distributing the periodic vacancy magazine, telephony, information technology and the electronic and manual receipt of the bids from applicants. At the end of each "bidding" cycle, the Agency returns a summary of the "bids" to each authority, who then prioritises offers made to the successful applicant based on their own Allocations Scheme. The Agency also provides regular and detailed statistical information to the local authority on bids.

There are lots of benefits to the Consortium and our applicants in contracting with an existing CBL Agency to provide the Consortium's CBL Scheme, as opposed to setting up our own joint operation from scratch, and the Consortium will therefore contract with an existing CBL Agency to operate its CBL Scheme, on the Consortium's own terms, through a competitive tendering process. This approach will substantially reduce IT complexities and costs; benefit from the Agency's experience; save significant officer time in implementation; reduce significantly the implementation period; and benefit immediately from the range of applicant bidding

mechanisms (see **Section 10** below). These existing agencies have also produced their “User Guides”, translated into a range of other languages, to increase their accessibility.

For these reasons, the Consortium has adopted this approach. However, it is emphasised that the CBL Agency will operate the Consortium’s Joint CBL Scheme as a “stand-alone” operation, to the Consortium’s own requirements, and not as an extension to their existing scheme(s).

The other benefit of this approach is that, because the systems have already been well tested, the Consortium intends to commence the operation of the CBL scheme in a number, probably all, of the local authority areas from the outset. This will also enable the benefits of collaborative working to be obtained straight away, without a pilot being undertaken in one area - which would have high operational costs for the pilot authority. It should be noted, however, that because some of the partner local authorities want to first move from a points system to a banding system for their Allocations Scheme, it may take longer to the launch date than if the Scheme commenced with just one authority. However, the overall period to full implementation will be the same as if a pilot had first been undertaken.

## **10. Project Management – Appointment of CBL Consultant**

Implementation of any CBL Scheme is complex, but a Joint CBL Scheme amongst **[X]** local authorities and their landlords brings significant additional challenges. However with expertise, combined with good project management, it also offers many opportunities for time and cost savings, through avoiding duplication of effort.

For this reason, if the bid is successful, the Consortium will appoint an experienced consultant, specialising in the implementation and operation of CBL schemes, to project manage the implementation and to co-ordinate the activities of the Consortium’s Partners. This will include: the production of the Joint CBL Agency Specification; undertaking the Agency tendering; co-ordination and provision of evaluation advice; undertaking of contract negotiations; liaison with the CBL Agency on implementation; co-ordination of Partners; project-management of CBL implementation for each Partner (jointly and individually); and liaison/negotiation with existing Housing IT providers on requirements and costs of modules and interfaces.

## **11. Offering Choice to Applicants**

One of the benefits gained from the size and experience of an existing CBL Agency, is that applicants will be able to use, immediately, a variety of electronic/interactive and other ways to receive information on vacancies across the Consortium’s area (*since the website, magazine and other media will provide details of vacancies arising in each local authority to all applicants registered across the Consortium’s area*). Applicants will also be able to bid for individual properties, from launch, using these electronic/interactive ways, which include:

- One interactive website, providing information on all vacancies within the Consortium’s area, (including photos, details of location, type, rent, service charge, council tax band and landlord of the available accommodation) and enabling applicants to “bid” on-line.
- Interactive kiosks located at key locations within the Consortium’s area, giving access to the website to obtain information and to bid
- Publication of a one fortnightly magazine, providing the same information as the website, and providing vouchers for applicants to return by post or by hand
- The ability to submit “bids” by post, telephone, text messages and email or Internet – all interactive and utilising automatic call management.

Furthermore, over time, applicants will be able to increase their likelihood of success by bidding for vacancies for which they are more likely to be chosen. This will be achieved through the results of the “bidding” on each property advertised being published on the website and in the

next magazine, setting out the number of “bids” received on each property, as well as the Band and registration date of the successful applicant. This will help applicants to see how long the successful applicant has been waiting, compared to them.

Since all homeless applicants must be registered on their local authority’s Housing Register by law, they will also be able to bid under the CBL Scheme, through their housing application.

## **12. Increasing Mobility and Cross-Border Movement**

At the end of the “bidding” cycle, each local authority will analyse the “bids” received for their area and offer each property, following a prioritisation and selection process in accordance with their own Allocation Scheme. Generally, the property would be offered to the applicant in the highest band, who has been registered the longest or (if some local authorities are still using a points scheme on launch) the applicant with the most points, who had “bid” for the vacancy.

Although each local authority will continue to operate its own Housing Register and prioritise applicants in accordance with its own Allocation Scheme, under the Joint CBL Scheme, applicants from any of the partner local authority areas will be able to register with any other partner local authority. When bidding for properties in other local authority areas, applicants will benefit from the informative and educative experience explained in [Section 10](#) above, in order to increase their likelihood of success in securing housing in other areas.

Through the website and fortnightly magazine – which will have high circulation and readership – other important information on housing options will be provided, including details of mobility schemes, particularly (when launched) the all-embracing, MoveUK scheme

Quite uniquely, two of the partners (East Herts and Uttlesford DCs) currently share nomination rights for a proportion of vacant properties that arise in their area – through the Stansted Area Housing Partnership – with each authority receiving a set percentage of nominations. The Joint CBL Scheme will therefore increase further the choice given to their applicants.

Once the scheme is in operation, the Consortium will explore the possibility of devising a common application form, enabling applicants to only have to complete one form to register with the local authorities of their choice.

## **13. Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) Shared Ownership and Key Worker Schemes**

The Consortium will include vacancies that occur for shared ownership and other LCHO opportunities, including key worker housing, within the Joint CBL Scheme. For all applicants bidding for such properties, nominations to RSLs will be prioritised in accordance with the Allocations Schemes. RSLs will then offer properties in accordance with the priority given, provided that applicants are able to meet the required income criteria.

In respect of key worker housing, the Consortium will work closely with the two Zone Agents for Essex and Hertfordshire (Moat and Aldwyck), [\[both of whom are RSL Partners of the Consortium\]](#), in order to maximise the capture of demand for key worker housing, not only from areas covered by the Consortium, but for the whole of the Sub-Region.

## **14. Private Sector Landlords**

There are currently no private sector landlords within the Consortium. However, should this bid be successful, the Consortium’s Project Plan includes provision for inviting private sector landlords to provide details of market-rented vacancies to the Scheme, for which applicants for social housing can apply - via the appropriate local authority.

## 15. The Housing Options Approach

By implementing a Joint CBL Scheme – and giving greater choice and empowerment to applicants - the local authority partners will be able to adopt more of a “housing options” approach to the provision of social housing. Indeed, on implementation, a number of local authority officers across the Consortium’s area will be re-designated “Housing Option Advisors to reflect their increased advisory role and the demise of their “allocation officers’ ” role. In addition to focussed advice, including advice on “bidding strategies”, the Scheme will:

- Promote a wider range of housing options (e.g. shared ownership, LCHO, private rented and mobility) – See Sections 11, 12 and 13 above)
- Through the website and magazine, provide information on other related housing services (e.g. care and repair schemes, DFGs and disabled adaptations)
- Increase the marketing of, and give prominence to, the small numbers of difficult to let properties, and encourage applicants with low priority to apply.

### PART C - COSTINGS AND EXTENT OF ODPM FUNDING

The costings for the implementation of the Joint CBL Scheme (excluding the Partners’ officer time and ongoing costs), and the required ODPM funding, are as follows:

Item	Cost	ODPM Grant
<b>Project Management:</b> 160 days CBL Consultancy (@ £450 p/d) to provide the project management services set out in Section 10	£72,000	£56,000
<b>ICT :</b> (a) Purchase of additional Housing IT modules/ interfaces, purchase of internal ICT staff support time, purchase and commissioning of 12 internet kiosks across Consortium’s area (b) CBL consultant – See Section 10 (10 days)	£63,000	£30,000
<b>Information and Publications:</b> (a)(CBL Consultant) Produce consultation material for partner organisations, undertake consultation, disseminate outcomes (b)(CBL Agency) - including creation of website, leaflets, promotional material, posters, Scheme Guide, bidding vouchers	£20,000	£10,000
<b>Training:</b> (CBL Agency) Operational - for LA and RSL staff. Awareness - for partner organisations	£5,000	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£160,000</b>	<b>£96,000</b>

The costs not funded by the ODPM will be funded equally between the [X] local authorities, for which they are making capital and revenue budget provision in the forthcoming budget cycle.

Although not forming part of this bid, for information, it is estimated that the ongoing fee to the CBL Agency by each local authority will be reduced by around 40% - from around £60 per vacant property to around £36 per property – as a result of operating as a Consortium.

### PART D - OUTLINE PROJECT TIMETABLE

	Start	End
Outcome of ODPM Bid	-	Dec 2005
Appointment of CBL Consultant	Jan 2006	Feb 2006
Produce Joint Specification	Mar 2006	May 2006
Consult Partner Organisations on CBL Scheme	May 2006	Jun 2006
Tender/Appoint CBL Agency	July 2006	Aug 2006
CBL Scheme Implementation/Preparation	Sept 2006	Mar 2007

Publicise to private landlords and invite to join CBL Scheme	Oct 2006	Mar 2007
Joint CBL Scheme Commences	-	Mar 2007