

## Heads of Terms – Partnership Agreement

Under the Review of the Bristol Housing Allocations Scheme it was deemed necessary to review and rewrite the Partnership Agreement currently in place between Bristol City Council and the partner organisations it works with to provide affordable and social housing through HomeChoice Bristol.

The goal of the exercise is both to ensure that any legal and regulatory aspects of the agreement that may have changed since it was introduced are brought up to date, as well as to address various aspects about the nature of the working relationship between the parties and the operating principles agreed between them.

In addition, it has been proposed that a separate such agreement be implemented between BCC and Community-Lead Housing organisations that takes into account the differences between these organisations and Housing Associations / Registered Providers.

The following represents a comprehensive but not necessarily complete view of the items that are to be discussed and addressed as part of the current Partnership Agreement review and rewrite which will be undertaken in the first quarter of 2023.

**Regulatory and Legal considerations** – making sure that the agreement reflects the most up-to-date requirements with regard to information sharing, data management, protection of personal information, and to bring it in line wherever necessary with changes that are being made to the Allocations Scheme as a result of the review.

To also ensure that there is an agreed process for integrating any future changes in regulatory/ legislative requirements into the agreement.

The agreement is to be confined to relets in future as a section on Sustainable Lettings Plans for New Developments is being added to the Allocation Policy. *(See the table below)*

**Confirmation of over-arching shared principles and ethos:** Current principles, aims of the partnership and aims of the service to be discussed and reviewed with intentions, objectives, mutual accountability, approach and commitment to statutory adherence to be confirmed and articulated.

### Specific points for review:

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT REVIEW – PROPOSED AGENDA ITEMS	
Topic	BCC Concerns for discussion
Deposits and Rent in advance / arrears	The practice of requiring deposits and / or rent in advance presents an obstacle to many on the housing register. BCC does not charge deposit and collects rent in arrears. Need to understand implications of seeking an approach to lettings by RPs that moves away from this to improve accessibility to more rented homes for more applicants
Provision for and approach to Care Leavers	Waive deposit/ allow 'sustainable debt' Ref recently developed Improved offer for Care Leavers (BCC: Jo Essex / Jane Houben)
Affordability checks	There is a perception that affordability checks may be used as a way of stopping people on low incomes from accessing housing. Need to agree principles and practices.

Basis for assessment	Some providers are using % income assessment on whole incomes. This practice needs to be reviewed as the current ratios mean the income required to qualify may be unreasonable.  Cannot just look at rent in any case – should be looking at total cost as, for example, the higher cost of rent in a new build may be offset by the reduction in utilities due to increased efficiency.
Provision and purpose of 'own lets'	Propose reduction from current max 30% to max 20% in the light of the provision made in the new SLP section of the revised Allocation Scheme that provides greater latitude in making allocation for initial lets.
Landlord Agreed Transfers (including cross-county)	Criteria, purpose, volume, and reciprocal agreements
Sensitive Lets	Circumstances under which these are permitted / how they need to be positioned etc to address perceptions of exclusion rather than protection
Approach to new developments	The former provision for 'Local Letting Plans' for New Builds is being replaced by a section on Sustainable Letting Plan criteria in the main allocation scheme. This can be referenced so that the Partnership Agreement focuses on relets only
System costs and pricing	There is contention about the costs associated with HCB but these are necessary for the provision and delivery of the service.
Allocation criteria/ ground for rejecting applicants	How 'skipping' is documented and reported. Implications of unjustified skipping.
Tenancy Readiness	Is there, or could we implement, a better tenancy readiness program that is acceptable / recognised by all?
<i>Hand off</i> activities on completion of allocation	To improve handovers/ make sure all forms and processes are completed and that the fields and documentation to enable good reporting is completed e.g. HB amendments etc - to better support sustainability, particularly with vulnerable residents (Care Leavers/ Single parents...) SOP: Create and add a checklist for ensuring all handoff requirements are completed
Advertising protocols and standards	Improvements are being made to advertising. Discuss minimum requirements for ads. Situations under which they can be restricted etc (e.g. wording required when restricted to better manage perceptions of exclusion)
Future systems integration	Requests for direct integration to Provider Lettings System now and in future. Numerous factors inhibit what may be possible in this regard.
Reporting	What should be monitored / reported, how often and how (mechanism) e.g. Skipping Reports etc What is possible now versus what we want in future when we have new systems

### **Work performed to date**

Commentary has been provided by BCC Legal on the current agreement. Input has been solicited from all current Partners to the agreement and this has been combined into an overall view that can be used for discussion.