

SERVICE UPDATE

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| <u>Name of Function:</u> | Early Intervention and Community Empowerment |
| <u>Date:</u> | 4 September 2023 |
| <u>Title of Update:</u> | Choice Based Letting |
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UPDATE:

Background:

Aberdeen City Council approved a new Housing Allocation Policy at Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee on 14 March 2023 [CUS/23/065 Choice Based Lettings – Amendment to the Housing Allocation Policy](#).

Following this the Council launched Choice Based Letting and implemented the new Allocation Policy on 27 June 2023. A service update on the implementation of Choice Based Letting was requested by Committee on 6 July 2023.

Choice Based Letting:

All general need properties that are ready to let are advertised via the Choice Based Letting module on Housing Online from noon on a Tuesday until the following Monday at 23:59. Applicants are able to place up to 10 bids each week for properties that they have an interest in. To do this they must have a live application with the Council. Amenity and Sheltered properties are not part of Choice Based Letting at this time, and continue to be allocated via the previous shortlisting method.

Each property advertised contains photos of the outside of the property and one photo of each room. Also within the advert are details of the weekly rent, property type, letting area, street address, number of bedrooms, energy rating, floor level, number of access steps, whether pets are allowed, and the position of the bedroom/bathrooms. At the end of each bidding cycle applicants are able to log on and see where on the shortlist they placed for each property that they bid for.

The launch of Choice Based Letting was advertised via social media channels, the Newsbite newsletter, as well as letters and e-mails to all Council applicants and tenants. The Council produced 3 YouTube videos: [Get Ready for CBL](#), [How Access Choice Based Letting](#) and [What is Choice Based Letting](#) to support people to understand the Choice Based Letting process, alongside the existing '[Registering for Housing Online](#)' video. A further 2 videos are planned describing the process after the bidding cycle closes and lease signing.

Drop-in sessions were arranged in Marischal College, Tillydrone Community Campus and Mastrick Library to support people to sign up to Housing Online and use the platform to place bids. In addition briefing sessions were held for elected members, Council staff and other organisations who support people to apply for housing with the Council.

Implementation:

The information below takes into account the 9 weekly bidding cycles that have occurred from 27 June to 21 August.

There has been an average of 33 properties per week available for applicants to bid on.

The 36 new build homes at Cloverhill have also been advertised via Choice Based Letting. To ensure fairness and to prevent applicants having to place multiple bids, only one advert is made per property type/floor level. Therefore only 12 adverts were made for the 36 homes.

The following table shows the number of bids placed by applicants as well as the number of urgent bids placed. Urgent bids, are bids are placed on behalf of applicants who have an urgent need of rehousing as defined by the [Council Housing Allocation Policy](#) or where an applicant is unable to bid for themselves.

| Date of Cycle | 27/06 | 04/07 | 11/07 | 18/07 | 25/07 | 01/08 | 08/08 | 15/08 | 22/08 |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Number of Properties | 66 | 32 | 35 | 30 | 27 | 30 | 32 | 27 | 25 |
| Applicant Bids | 1695 | 670 | 695 | 693 | 799 | 634 | 1361 | 648 | 962 |
| Urgent Bids | 1724 | 1282 | 1367 | 1377 | 991 | 1208 | 1355 | 1817 | 2363 |
| Total | 3419 | 1952 | 2062 | 2070 | 1790 | 1842 | 2716 | 2465 | 3325 |

There have been a total of 1061 applicants bidding online during this period.

Every property advertised to date has received bids, with the highest being 243 bids for one property in Linksfield and the lowest was 5 bids for a property in Balnagask.

Withdrawals / Refusals

An anticipated benefit of Choice Based Letting is a reduction in the amount of refusals and withdrawals of offers, and therefore staff time spent on processing these. To date there are 108 current or accepted offers outstanding from the bidding cycles and therefore comparable data cannot be drawn.

The early indication is that applicants placing bids themselves are less likely to have a bid withdrawn or to be refuse their offer.

| | Refusals | Withdrawals | Total |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| From Applicant Bids | 25 | 8 | 33 |
| From Urgent Bids | 66 | 88 | 154 |

Enhancements:

To enable applicants to bid for any property that meets their bedroom requirements, regardless of area, during the weekend of 19/20 August all waiting and transfer applications were updated to include all areas.

This improvement was made following feedback from applicants. The system required applicants to wait 24 hours between updating their application and placing a bid, therefore this change has removed that delay in the bidding process.

The Council launched Choice Based Letting with properties being put on the bidding cycle once per week at noon on a Tuesday. This means that properties remain void for longer as it then takes 7 days until the next batch are advertised. Following the successful launch of the system Officers are now confident that we can upload adverts for properties twice per week, this will be done on Tuesday at noon and by 17:00 on Thursdays, to allow support from Officers to members of the public during the bidding cycle. The overall bidding cycle will continue to close on Monday at 23:59. This change will be implemented from 5 September 2023 onwards.

Tenancy Sustainment:

Committee asked for an update on tenancy sustainment following properties being let by Choice Based Letting. Comparable tenancy sustainment data will be available 365 days after a property is let. This is the methodology used by the Scottish Housing Regulator and will allow benchmarking comparisons to be made.

More Information:

More information on Choice Based Letting is available from the Council website here: <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/housing/choice-based-lettings>